

Ark for the Brokenhearted

By Elizabeth Cain

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Reena woke with an azure sky cast into the stained glass like an artisan's new work. Local people made everyone a breakfast of porridge, mangos, and corn cakes. Some of the blacks acted as if they had never seen so many white faces in one place and definitely had not seen a white child holding a black child's hand. After Sister Kimya helped load the children and their possessions in the vans, she saw the Dodoma people gathering around to touch the priest and wave at his strange group of travelers, and many of them called out "God's blessings" or "Allah be with you," and the boys and girls waved back.

About two in the afternoon, they stopped by a roadside stand selling packaged food and some local fruit. The children resisted getting back in the vans, so weary of this long, long excursion, but finally, at three, they were on the road again. They entered the streets of Dar es Salaam at the peak of rush hour and didn't reach the schoolyard until almost seven. The next day was Saturday, so all could rest and recover.

Parents retrieved worn-out sons and daughters; teachers and nuns drove others home. Sister Kimya offered to take Suzanna and Safina but of course didn't speak a word until she dropped Farley's daughter off at the Post. The girls hugged each other and promised to call each other in the morning.

"You did well, my sweet," Reena said as they left the military base.

"It was hard, but ... I think I saw my father," she said in a reverent voice.

"I think you did," her mother said, and removed the head garment.

Safina held out the remarkable glass that fit perfectly in her eight-year-old hand. "I hope I will never break this," she said.

In the haven of peace on the Indian Ocean, Reena and Safina trudged up their stairs. Sitting on the landing leaning against their front door was Kiiku.

"Oh Lord, I don't think I can handle any more today," Reena whispered.

"I need a place to stay," the young man said.

"You are welcome here, of course, Kiiku. Come in."

"Thank you, mama. I'll be no trouble. Just for two nights, maybe?"

"What is wrong, son?" Reena asked.

"Someone has seen me with my mother. A white man on a horse chased me through the streets, but I circled back behind him and found narrow spaces where the horse could not go. I'm tired and hungry, and I missed my little sister," he said.

"Was it Farley?"

"No ... another soldier."

"You stole Farley's horse last year, didn't you?" Reena said.

"Yes. He's a good animal. He's well cared for," Kiiku assured her.

"Still, it was a crime."

"What was a crime?" Safina asked. She had gone to her room to get ready for bed and had come back to eat with them, clutching the leopard.

"I took Major Farley's horse when he left him alone tied to a broken fence on the street," Kiiku told her.

"You stole Resolute?" she asked with alarm in her voice.

"Ah ... that is his name. Very fitting," Kiiku said.

"Yes, and you should give him back," Safina said crossly.

"Maybe I will," he said. "But, Safina, where were you today? You didn't come home from school."

"No. Some of us went to Shanga," Safina said.

His eyes lit up, and he looked over at Reena, who was heating some soup. "I didn't know. What did you find there?" he asked, meaning, Reena was sure, what toys or jewelry.

"I found my father," she answered as clear as day.

Kiiku took in a sharp breath. "Did you tell anyone?"

"No. Not even my best friend."

"You are very strong. What did your father say?"

Safina closed her eyes as if trying to remember the exact scene.

"He said my name and gave me a beautiful drinking glass he had made."

Reena had just poured some milk into it and set it on the table with bowls of chicken and vegetables in a coconut-flavored broth.

"Eat, you two. You can talk tomorrow," she said.

They sat in silence, taking mouthfuls of the satisfying soup. She felt as protective of Kiiku as of her own child. Finally she sent Safina off, already half-asleep. The girl disappeared down the hall lined with photos taken by a man who loved Tanzania and its people but who could not help them now. He was far away with his own cherished Reena Pavane, who had loved Safina's father in her own daring way.

"Reena?" Kiiku broke into her reverie. "What will you do now?"

"Do my job at the hospital, raise Safina, worship God, and love Dakimu as long as he needs me," she answered.

"I fear a terrible ending," Kiiku said.

"You must have faith, little leopard. There are many things only God can do."

The next day, Reena left Safina with her brother so she could go to work. "Do not open the door to anyone," she said as she prepared to leave.

"Not even Major Farley?" Safina wanted to know.

"Especially not him. You know your brother is wanted by the police, and the military has been looking for him too. Just mind me, child. You don't have to understand everything."

"Someday I will."

"Yes, I'm sure someday you will. Let Kiiku help you with your homework and listen to his stories."

"Okay, Mama."

"Kiiku, please keep your stories *child appropriate*."

"Yes, ma'am," he said. He was folding the sheets and blankets he had used on the couch.

"Do you think you can fix your sister something to eat?" Reena asked.

"Oh yes. I am a brilliant cook!" he exclaimed.

“Well, I may not have brilliant ingredients, but do what you can.”

“*Asante sana*, mama.”

“Yes, yes, I must go. Safina? Mind your brother,” she called to her daughter, who had gone back to her bedroom.

“Okay, Mama,” she called back.

“You trust me, Reena,” he said

“After I saw your father again, I knew I could trust his son. Now, I’m going,” she said and opened the door.

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Kiiku washed some dishes that were still in the sink and made a special porridge with maple syrup and fresh pineapple. He fried Reena’s last half pound of bacon and started making some coffee. Then, noticing the instant hot chocolate, he made a small pot of that with cream instead of milk. When Safina finally got to the table, she couldn’t believe it.

“Is this a holiday or something?”

“It is my first real day with my sister. I want it to start with a bang,” he said.

“Well, I don’t like pineapple, but I’ll pick the pieces out.”

“You city girls are spoiled,” he teased.

“I don’t think a girl who just saw her father for the first time in her life is that spoiled,” she said with a small pout.

“I didn’t see him until I was about twenty-five,” he informed her.

“Oh ... I’m sorry, Kiiku,” she said, and then ate a large chunk of pineapple without making a face.

“What did our father say to you?”

“Not much. We weren’t supposed to know each other. Some bad people are looking for him.”

“I think you have things mixed up,” her brother said. “Some *good* people are looking for him because he did a bad thing, well, many bad things.”

“I don’t believe it, and I don’t want to know.”

“That’s good because I’m not going to tell you,” Kiiku said.

“I said I didn’t want to know *yet*.”

“You are a smart girl, little Safina.”

“I’m not so little!”

“Little ... but with a big heart, I can see already.”

There was silence after that. They ate their breakfast.

“Do you want to know a secret?” Safina asked finally.

“I don’t know. Whose secret is it?”

“My mother’s.”

“Oh, I don’t think so!” Kiiku said adamantly.

“Well, it’s mine too, so it’s all right.”

She led him into her mother’s room, got down on her hands and knees, and began to pry the floorboards loose where she had seen her mother bury things.

“Oh, Safina, what on earth?”

“Mostly they’re presents you left for us, but here is a book. I want you to read me something from it.”

Kiiku stared at Jim Stone’s *Memoirs*. His mother had that book, but even translated into Kiswahili, she didn’t understand it. Kiiku himself had not ever finished it. It was surely not for this child to hear. She told him a white man called Jim had written it and had said what he liked about Tanzanians and that she wanted to know some of those things. Maybe someone would write about her in a book.

“And what have you done to be in a book?” Kiiku asked seriously.

“I saved my best friend from a beating with stones when some bullies were hurting her because of her birthmark.”

“I’d say that counts for a lot,” he said. He didn’t tell her he had been watching her that day. “Who is your best friend?”

“Her name is Suzanna Farley, and we love each other, even though she’s white and I’m black.”

“Farley ... not related to Major Fulsom Farley.”

“She’s his daughter, and sometimes I get to play at her house on the Post. We brush the horses and do our homework, but we have to be very careful because Suzanna’s mother used to hate me.”

“Why did she *used* to hate you?”

“Because I’m black.”

“No, I mean why doesn’t she hate you anymore?”

“I healed her once of a terrible pain in her head.”

“Maybe you should have hated her instead,” he said, mindful of his own experience with white people.

“No, she’s broken, like Jester. She doesn’t need any more hate, only peace.”

“Who the hell is Jester? You’re losing me, girl,” her brother said.

“Jester is a horse that was in a sling for a long time because of a broken leg. But he’s mended now. So Mrs. Farley can get mended too.”

“Do you know what broke her?” Kiiku asked cautiously, thinking, *This child has too much knowledge for her own good.*

“A black man,” Safina said matter-of-factly.

“What black man? What’s a black man to her anyway?”

“I don’t know, but she said, ‘He was the ruin of us all,’ but I didn’t know what that meant.”

“Nor should you, Safina. People have their own demons. We shouldn’t mess with them.”

“I don’t see her much. She’s *quieted* like Jester and sleeps a lot.”

“You mean given a tranquilizer?”

“Yes, that’s the word.”

“Oh my, little girl, what have you stumbled into?”

“Well, one good thing, Mr. Farley likes me and wants me to be Suzanna’s friend, so he is a kind of *mlinzi*. I had to tell him what that meant.”

“A guardian, a faithful watchman,” Kiiku translated. “That’s good if he can be trusted.”

“Why wouldn’t he?”

“Lots of people make promises and friends they can’t keep. They make choices and then find they have made the wrong choice for themselves,” he said.

“I will never do that,” she said. “I have chosen Suzanna, and I will never turn against her.”

“What if she turns against you?” Kiiku asked.

Safina had to think about that for a minute. Then she said, “It’s just that I think I understand the world better than she does. She may stand by me not knowing why she shouldn’t.”

“How did you get so perceptive, my sister?”

“I watch things happening and try to imagine the outcome. Like the day the major put Suzanna and me on Jester. It was muddy, and the horse had been in the sling for a long time. I was prepared to land in the mud long before Suzanna. She was so surprised to find herself on the ground. I expected it.”

“I think you can hear the words in this book. Come on. I’ll read you a bit of it.”

They settled on the sofa where they could see the distant Indian Ocean. Safina snuggled close to Kiiku. He opened the red book randomly and began to read from the memoir of Jim Stone.

“I met Dakimu Reiman—”

“Who is that?” Safina broke in.

“Our father. I thought you knew.”

“No. Mama wouldn’t tell me his name.”

“I’ll start again,” Kiiku said, wondering if he would lose all Reena’s faith in him.

“I met Dakimu Reiman seven days after I lifted Reena Pavane out of her burning village—”

“Not my mother!”

“No, the white missionary ... ‘and into the one British helicopter that had come. She told me she had promised her people that all would be saved, and now I was forcing her to leave them, to save herself when they would surely die. Christians and whites were at the mercy of savage tribes pouring across the land with their chants and their guns.’”

“I don’t like this story,” Safina said.

“Just wait. There’s a good part coming. ‘I saw a black boy clinging to the white girl as I tore her away. She begged us to take him, but the pilot said no. She told me his name was Nathan and that he’d be dead within the hour. I forced her into the chopper and turned back for a photo. The boy was holding onto a broken cross.’ Look, Safina, here it is,” Kiiku said.

“I don’t want to see it. Keep reading.”

“In just seconds, it seemed, we were in the air. Below us huts flamed and people fled into the forest. The girl sat very still, but tears streamed down her cheeks. She didn’t know how sick I was. Malaria had weakened me of late, and the air was very rough. The noise was deafening, but I couldn’t have talked anyway. I tried desperately not to throw up. Suddenly this lovely stranger took my hand and held on tightly, and I thought, *This woman is a healer*, though I did not believe in her god. She was not afraid for herself while the helicopter bucked and dipped in the wind. She was comforting *me*.”

“I like that lady,” Safina said.

“Maybe you will meet her someday,” Kiiku said. “She is Jim’s wife now, and they have been together a long time.”

“Go on.”

“We landed in Dar es Salaam, but Reena didn’t let go of my hand. She told me to stay still for a moment and take some deep breaths. Pretty soon I was able to ask her if I could take her someplace. But she had no place to go, so I said she could come with me. We were together in my apartment for six days. She let me write her story, the reason she had been the only white in the mission village of Huzuni, and why she loved Africa and its natives.

“We walked the streets and visited the markets during the day, and I introduced her to my friends. Most of them were black, which pleased her very much. We ate a small meal at my table in the evenings and met in the hallway before going to our separate rooms. Sometimes we just touched briefly. We seemed to have a connection that was beyond words.

“Then I was called on a top-secret political exercise, to record the event with my camera and my pen. I was averse to leaving the girl. She was only twenty and not used to city life, but I was told I would return in two weeks. So that night, in the dark hall, I kissed her.

“The next morning, I walked onto the British Air and Ground Patrol Base, and a gallant and handsome black greeted me and helped me with my bags. He steadied me with an arm once when I felt about to faint. I had forgotten to take my malaria medicine that morning and asked if he could explain to the officials that I had gone back to my apartment for it. He said he’d even tell them that I should not be going on this excursion, as I did not look well.

“Before either of us could speak again, I was commandeered into the vehicle and driven away by a devious and self-serving man named Colonel Edmund Hahlos.”

“I don’t like him already,” Safina broke in.

“No one did, child,” Kiiku said. “But the black man’s name was Dakimu Reiman.”

She clapped her hands. “Oh, read me more! Read me more!” she cried. “But wait. Why was Father’s name not African?”

“That’s not in this part, but I’ll tell you. He was raised in the same village that Reena had taught in, by the first missionaries in Huzuni, the Reimans. They gave him that name.”

“Oh. Should that be our last name?”

“Technically, I suppose, but listen. Here’s the good part ... ‘You will hear the details of my trek with Hahlos, my unbearable pain without my malaria meds, my heart’s sadness at never saying good-bye to Reena, my horror at how Edmund used the natives to his own ends, but I want to tell you now what that compassionate black, Dakimu, did. He put himself at great risk, suffered and almost died crossing the flooded Rufiji River, for *me*. That young, courageous Dakimu brought to me many weeks later the chloroquine for my malaria and the lovely missionary, Reena Pavane.’”

“I know about that. Mr. Stone told me, but it’s nice to hear the words he wrote about it,” Safina said.

“He stole a jeep, supplies, and medicine and protected that white Reena so together they could save Jim Stone. It was a harrowing journey. You can read it yourself when you are older, but think of the hero our father was then when you hear about the crimes of which he is accused.”

“He will always be a hero to me,” she said.

"To me too," Kiiku said. "Now, we should put the book back. Your mother may not want you to hear the story just yet."

"Okay."

Safina placed the red book in the hiding hole under the floorboards. Then she said to her brother, "Thank you, Chui, for showing me a piece of our father's heart."

Kiiku tossed her the stuffed leopard and said, "Don't let anyone hear you call me that."

For a while, he helped his sister with her math and listened to her read the Bible. Kiiku said he was not Catholic but admitted that the faith seemed to have given much comfort to their father. He always wore a gold cross and said he followed the example of Jesus in all things.

"But Jesus didn't kill anyone," Safina said.

"Of course, sweetie, mere humans can never be Jesus," her brother said.

"I saw Father go into the confessional at Shanga. I wanted to run after him and throw my arms around him! Can the police chase him forever?" Safina asked.

"For what he did, yes," Kiiku answered.

"But he saved Mr. Stone. Doesn't that cancel his crimes a little?"

"To us, Safina. To those who love him. To others, saving the life of *one* white man does not justify taking the lives of ... four."

"He killed *four* white people? Safina asked, her eyes widening.

"I should not have told you," Kiiku said.

"Well, I don't believe it! He wouldn't have done that without a good reason!"

"I believe two of those were unavoidable and perhaps justified, but the other two were not. And oh, my dear Safina, there were others."

"Is this story in the red book?" she asked.

"Some of the most terrible killing is there. But I don't want you to read it," he said.

"Have you ever killed anyone, Kiiku?"

He hesitated and then said, "No more than any Chui would ... to survive," he answered.

"I don't think we have a big enough space to hide you, brother. But I will not let anyone in," she said.

"It's nice to be safe in *someone's* heart," he said softly.

"You are safe in God's heart," she said.

"Hmm ... that would be appealing to believe," he said.

He thumbed through the pages of the Good Book. "Hey, Safina, do you think if I stopped and looked right now, wherever my fingers are, God will speak to me?"

"I don't know, Kiiku, but wherever you stop, there will be a meaning. It's for you to decide if it's for your eyes," she replied.

He opened the Bible, ran his fingers down the page, and read, "*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging ...* Oh, that is so beautiful!" he said.

Just then Reena came in the door. "What is so beautiful?" she asked as she approached the couch where brother and sister sat side by side with the open Bible.

Kiiku took her hand and placed it on the Holy words. She read them and then said, "Those were powerful words for the ancient people of God."

"They are still powerful today, to draw my hand and my heart to them ... but I am a Leopard. I know no god," he said.

Kiiku found a way out of the city the next day and arrived at Shanga in the middle of the night. He went straight to his father's door. Dakimu opened it tentatively.

"It is only your son ... what are you afraid?" Kiiku asked.

"I'm not afraid, only not wanting to scare it."

"Scare what?"

"The *chui*," Dakimu said.

As if on command, the leopard slunk out of the shadows at the end of the *vibanda*. The two men stood very still. The big cat brushed against their legs, but a noise in the next hut startled it, and it bounded away.

"Baba, what do you think of this?" Kiiku asked.

"I think it is a spirit," Dakimu said.

"No, Father, it was very real."

"I love him," Dak said.

"As you love me?"

"Yes ... like a son."

"Maybe it is a *mlinzi*, a watchman, a thing to guard you," Kiiku whispered, hoping the cat would come back.

"Yes, but it should not be here. Someone will kill it. Oh God, Kiiku. It is my punishment. I will know how David Sommers felt, how Felicia felt, how Suzanna will feel when she finds out who I am!"

"Baba, you have Safina. She may save you all," Kiiku said and led his father back into the hut. "Where is Baraka tonight?"

"With Kivuli."

"Then I'll stay with you," Kiiku said.

In the morning before light, Kiiku found the leopard lying at Dakimu's feet.

§ § §

After the children returned from the field trip to Shanga, Farley knew something had changed. Safina could not stop talking about the adventure but avoided his eyes when mentioning the gift she had received from one of the vendors—a hand-blown glass etched in green.

Farley himself had changed. He almost loved the black child but not just because she was so good for Suzanna and Felicia but because the woman he had secretly claimed for his heart for more than thirty years, long before he married Felicia, embraced all tribes, all colors, all ways of loving.

He had driven in wild circles looking for Resolute and ended up one night in the village a few miles from where his woman lived. Her friends told him she wasn't at home,

and he missed her so profoundly that he began to be drawn to others who reminded him of her.

And so, he leaned over to hug Safina as she and Suzanna sat whispering on the couch about their experience in Arusha. He caught words like *Joshua*, *rosary*, *confession*. Oh yes, he'd better confess how he'd wept after not finding his love where he'd always found her or retrieving his horse from the hands of a Chui madman.

Safina endured his large, white arms wrapped around her and said, "Are you all right, Mr. Farley?"

He hardly knew what to say. He had the means to destroy her life but hated himself for planning to do it and suddenly released her. "I perhaps have need of your medicine, Safina," he said.

She reached one hand out and placed it over his heart. Blood rushed in his ears, and something like elation swept through his body. What had the girl done to him?

"I have a secret," she said. "And though I can't tell you, I can explain how it feels. When you find something you have longed for your whole life, you want to shout it to the world, but you can't without hurting someone."

"I know that, child. I certainly know that," he said. *She has seen her father*, he said to himself. His chest felt warm where she had touched it, but his heart felt cold. He would have to disappoint her. He would have to break his promise to Reena. The black assassin that was their hope must pay for his violent deeds.

"You know I have a job to do, don't you, Safina?" he chanced to ask.

"Yes, sir," she said. "And so do I."

"I will not keep you from it," he said.

"What are you talking about, Daddy?" Suzanna asked, with something like alarm in her voice.

"Things that divide my world from yours," he said.

Safina didn't say a word but put her arm around Suzanna and stared back straight into his eyes. He couldn't stay in the room. He couldn't go into Felicia's room just then. So he went out into the dark night and walked across the parade grounds to the stable. There he raked fresh straw into piles of bedding in the stalls of his favorite horses, even in Resolute's empty one, believing in that moment that he would spare the life of Dakimu Reiman to have that horse back.

