

## Leopard Trail by Elizabeth Laird

### ABOUT THE STORY

Tom Wilkinson is a 12-year-old boy who moves with his family from England to Africa. At first, life is difficult for him: he misses his home country and his friends; his sister is more annoying than usual, and his parents aren't very happy. He also finds it hard to make friends at his new school, but things get better when he makes friends with a girl called Afra. One day, a hungry leopard moves into his neighbourhood. The local people are frightened of it, so Tom and Afra make a plan to find it a new home.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Laird is British writer, who was born in New Zealand in 1943 but moved to London at the age of two. After she graduated as a teacher, she taught English in many different countries around the world, including Malaysia, Ethiopia and Lebanon. She returned to London in 1979 and started a career as a writer, mainly of children's books. Her time in Africa has had a great influence on her work: some of her books, such as *Leopard Trail*, are set there.

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### Chapter 1

## Waking up in Africa

Scrabbling noises on the roof half woke Tom. He turned over, and his knuckles grazed the wall beside his bed. He frowned without opening his eyes. Something was wrong. The wall should be on the other side of the bed. Vaguely, he realized that the noises in his room were wrong too. There was no traffic from the road outside. Instead there were strange bird calls and that funny scratching noise on the roof. Suddenly, Tom woke up properly and sat bolt upright in bed. Africa! He was in Africa! He'd slept his first night in the new house in Nairobi. He looked around the bare-walled bedroom. They'd arrived after dark last night and all he'd seen of Africa so far was a confused jumble of trees and streets and wayside houses picked out from the lights of the taxi. He'd been so tired when they'd arrived he'd walked through

the front door and fallen dead asleep on the sofa. Dad must have picked him up and carted him off to bed ... There it was again. That noise on the roof. Tom jumped out of bed, pulled back the curtains and opened the window. The light nearly dazzled him. The sun was just coming up. It lit up a distant range of purple blue hills and the green sweep of land in between, and it sparkled on the big glossy leaves on the tall tree just outside his window and the spikes of a palm halfway down the garden. It was their garden now, he supposed. He didn't want to like it, because it didn't have the old shed and the swing and the broken front gate of his old garden back home in England. But he couldn't help feeling a little stirring of excitement. This garden was huge. There was a stretch of grass, too patchy to be called a lawn, with shrubs and trees dotted about on it, and more bushes running along the fence. Beyond the fence was what looked like a sort of woodland, with thick trees and undergrowth.

### VOCABULARY FOCUS

**scrabbling (line 1):** quick movements an animal makes with its feet

**knuckles (line 2):** the parts where your fingers bend

**grazed (line 2):** touched lightly

**frowned (line 3):** looked worried or unhappy

**vaguely (line 6):** in an unclear way

**sat bolt upright (lines 11–12):** sat up very quickly

**jumble (line 16):** collection of different things

**wayside (line 17):** by the side of a road

**carted off (lines 21–22):** took quickly

**dazzled (line 26):** if a bright light dazzles you, you can't see for a short time

**glossy (line 29):** shiny

**spike (line 30):** something sharp and pointed

**palm (line 31):** a kind of tropical tree

**stirring (line 36):** the beginning of a feeling

**patchy (lawn) (line 38):** with grass in some places but not others

**shrubs (line 39):** low thick bushes

**undergrowth (line 42):** small bushes that cover the ground



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#### Before reading

1a You are going to read about a boy who moves to a different country. Look at some of the things that might happen when you move. Which do you think are positive (P), which do you think are negative (N) and which could be both (B)?

- 1 You miss your old friends. ....
- 2 You make new friends. ....
- 3 You experience new things (a new language, different food, different people). ....
- 4 You can't speak the language at first. ....
- 5 You have a new home. ....
- 6 You go to a new school. ....

1b Now read the *About the story* section. Which of the things in exercise 1a are mentioned?

2 Work in pairs. Look at the chapter title, *Waking up in Africa*. Imagine you wake up in Africa for the first time. Make a list of things that might be different.

#### While reading

1 Read the extract and answer the questions.

- 1 Why does Tom wake up? What do you think it is?
- 2 Why do you think he is confused when he wakes up?
- 3 Which city has he moved to?
- 4 What is the first thing he notices when he opens the curtains?
- 5 The text says that Tom 'didn't want to like it [the garden]'. Why not? What do you think this tells us about Tom's feelings about moving to Africa?
- 6 How is Tom's new garden different to his old garden in England?

2 What differences does Tom notice about his new home in Africa? Make notes in the table below. Are any of your ideas from Before reading, exercise 2 mentioned?

Bedroom:	
Sounds/Noises:	
Light:	
Surroundings/garden:	

3 How does the author describe Tom's first impressions of Africa? Find words and phrases she uses for the following:

- 1 what Tom notices when he first arrives  
.....
- 2 the very bright sun  
.....
- 3 Tom's first view of Africa when he opens the window  
.....
- 4 the garden  
.....

#### After reading

1 Work in pairs. Discuss these questions.

- 1 Where in the world would you like to move to? What kind of place is it (countryside, city, beach, desert, etc.)?
- 2 Why would you like to move there?

2 Now imagine that you move to the place you discussed. Think about the things that are different. Make notes below.

- Sounds (e.g. animals, people, traffic): .....
- .....
- Smells (e.g. flowers, food, sea): .....
- .....
- Sights (e.g. trees, fields, buildings, people, animals, traffic, sky, light): .....
- .....
- Climate (e.g. temperature, snow, rain, wind, sun): .....
- .....

3 Now write a short description of what you notice when you wake up on the first morning in your new home. Complete the description below with your ideas. Try to use some of the descriptive words and phrases from While reading, exercise 3, if suitable.

- When I wake up, I notice .....
- I hear .....
- I see .....
- I smell .....

4 Work in small groups. Take turns to read your descriptions to each other.