

"... the study of a ... people which, for beauty of both style and concept, would be hard to match ..." (*New York Times Review of Books*)

In the 1950s Elizabeth Marshall Thomas accompanied her family on three expeditions to the Kalahari. Here they spent about four years, studying the hunting and gathering life of a small community of Bushmen or San, the Ju/wasi. In this her first book, Elizabeth Thomas writes evocatively of the gentle people with whom she became intensely involved and of the forbiddingly beautiful landscape in which they lived.

Highly acclaimed on its publication in 1959, this classic work is now being reprinted with the addition of an epilogue, in which the author describes the current plight of the Ju/wasi and tells the tragic story of their lives since she first knew them.

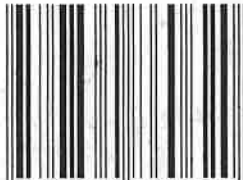
Elizabeth Thomas was born in Boston, Mass., in 1931. The writer of several books and numerous articles on anthropological subjects, she lives in New Hampshire with her husband.

Cover photograph by John Kramer (copyright, South African Museum)

FOR SALE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA ONLY

DAVID PHILIP
AFRICASOUTH
PAPERBACKS

ISBN 0-86486-062-5



9 780864 860620

Elizabeth Marshall Thomas

THE HARMLESS PEOPLE



The Harmless People

AFRICASOUTH PAPERBACKS

This series includes important works of southern African literature that are at present available only in hardback or are out of print or not readily accessible or 'banned'; there is also provision for new writing. The books chosen will be not only those whose worth has become acknowledged, but also interesting and significant works that need rescue from neglect. Among the titles contracted are a number of books recently 'unbanned', after having been sent by the publisher for review. Also included in the series are books from Africa south-of-the-Sahara, i.e. west, central and east African works not before available in southern Africa in paperback, but of particular interest or needed for study purposes. The first titles available in this landmark series are listed at the back of this book.

To STEPHEN

First published 1959 by Secker & Warburg, Ltd, London
Published 1988 in Africasouth Paperbacks by David Philip,
Publisher (Pty) Ltd, 217 Werdmuller Centre, Claremont,
Cape, South Africa

ISBN 0-86486-062-5

© 1959 and 1988 Elizabeth Marshall Thomas

Printed by Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd, 11th Avenue, Maitland,
Cape, South Africa

CONTENTS

I. THE DESERT	15
II. THE ROAD	35
III. THE BUSHMEN	43
IV. THE FIRE	61
V. GAI AND UKWANE	83
VI. VELD FOOD	101
VII. MOOD SONGS	111
VIII. THE DANCERS	123
IX. PEOPLES OF THE VELD AND SKY	133
X. BEAUTIFUL UNGKA AND LAZY KWI	152
XI. TOMA THE LEADER	163
XII. THE GROVE	186
XIII. SHORT KWI THE HUNTER	199
XIV. THE SUN DANCE	215
XV. THE MEDICINE BEES	230
Epilogue: THE BUSHMEN IN 1988	238

We set up a permanent camp. We arranged our trucks, pitched our tents, and waited. The third night that we waited there, all scattered in our blankets over the ground, three lions walked among us as we slept, sniffed us, and watched us with their yellow eyes, although we didn't know until morning when we found their tracks.

The fourth night a veld fire passed us. We were awake then; we saw the bright flames leaping at the trees, smelled the smoke, and heard the fire roaring as the wind pushed it forward into the grass.

III

THE BUSHMEN

On the morning of the fifth day, when we felt that we could wait no longer, Giske guessed that we might find Bushmen farther ahead, and we decided to try. Breaking a track is such a slow and tedious process that my brother John, Theunis, Giske, and I loaded one truck and set off in it, leaving the other people to load the other trucks and follow later, travelling faster in our tracks.

We rode west all morning, and at noon we came to an open pan where fine, soft grass as fine as hair was blowing, and we saw a lion there, a big male with a black, tangled mane growing all the way down his neck and ending between his shoulders. He had the muscled neck and shoulders and the wide, swelling jaw of male creatures, and when he raised his head to look at us we saw that he was old. His face was wrinkled and massive, and he looked straight at us with a direct, indifferent look, the blind gaze of cats. His paws were enormous, his fur was the colour of gold. He seemed so huge and bright in the sunlight, his eyes so cold and pale, that he fascinated us the way a cat fascinates birds. At that moment he could have walked up to us and carried one of us away.

Bushmen believe that certain famous sorcerers, once medicine men who chose to be poisoners and magicians instead of healers, have taken the form of certain lions, which can always be distinguished from ordinary lions by their great size and their ability to float in the air. Also, Bushmen say, the eclipses of the moon are caused by lions, as on very bright nights a lion may cover the moon's face with a great paw, giving himself darkness for better hunting.

Usually, when a lion sees you, he skulks away or bounds

off in great, ungainly leaps; in clumsy dodges, making a fool of himself because he is frightened; but when one raises his head and looks right at you, then turns as this one did, and walks off without even looking back, you understand at once why Bushmen believe the things they do.

As the lion walked away into a thicket of acacia trees we climbed off the truck and followed him. It was rash of us, but we were not afraid of him. We wanted a photograph. However, he had disappeared, and as we were looking cautiously around among the trunks of little trees we heard a motor roaring, gears grinding; and finally, as we watched, the jeep arrived with Cass and Bob (Dr. Story), who told us to go back to camp as fast as we could. Two Bushmen had arrived.

We started back at once and got there late in the afternoon, and there we found them, two small men, one old, one young, in silhouette as they squatted by the fire, turning as we came to look at us, very nervous and very ill at ease. They had been given food and tobacco—a blue cloud hung above their heads—and a bucket of water, but during the course of the afternoon they had drunk the bucket dry. As Theunis and Gishé, the only people who could have spoken to both them and us, had been away, the rest of the expedition had had to wait anxiously for our return, unable to communicate a single word.

Both men were thin, brown-skinned, and wore nothing but loincloths, and they looked very out of place next to us, among our big trucks and boxes of equipment, squatting naked like two frogs against the long grass and reddening sky of their country. We sat by the fire to talk with them, and it was the old man who answered our questions. His name was Ukwane, and he seemed very old, for he spoke with a hesitant, cracked voice that faded into a whisper at the end of every phrase, and whenever some of us would leave or join the group at the fire he would stare intently at us, frowning, leaning forward a little because he could barely see us, his eyes being filmed with cataracts, hazy blue.

Ukwane had great wrinkles lengthwise down his belly where his paunch had shrunk. His hands were knobbed and

his shoulders stiff, yet his legs were as supple as a baby's, for he sat crouched with his knees in the air and his heels tucked up tight against his buttocks. His skin looked old, too, like old leather, hardened and black like a glove that has been left in the rain, and his curly hair was dishevelled, uncut, untidy with pieces of straw.

Our questions frightened Ukwane, and often he was at a loss for something to reply. He thought we were policemen coming to look for some lost horses, for somehow a rumour had reached into the farthest corners of the veld that a European farmer had lost seven horses and all the people in the veld were afraid for their lives. The first thing he said was that he hadn't seen any horses and certainly hadn't taken them himself. He was too old, he said. We told him that we were not policemen and, besides, had never heard of the horses, but he was not reassured. He coughed and turned to the young man, who looked at us with nothing to say.

The young man was also very shy, but had a greater dignity than Ukwane because of his cool, proud bearing. He said very little, and when he did speak it was in a voice so soft that it was almost inaudible. Also, he held his hand in front of his mouth with a finger against his lips, which muffled his words so that only Ukwane could understand them. This was what the young man intended: he meant for the old man to speak for them both and only wanted to help him through tight spots in the conversation.

The young man told us his name, though, which was Gai. Gai sat crouching too, like Ukwane, and kept self-consciously shifting his position, pretending to be unconcerned. He glanced at us out of the corners of his eyes and smiled sceptically from time to time, for although he did not know us and, as we learned later, had not seen Europeans before, therefore had no way of judging our remarks and our expressions, he was younger than Ukwane, and prouder, and was afraid of showing his naïveté, afraid of seeming to believe a lie or disbelieving something that everyone should know was true.

Gai was extremely handsome. In fact, he was one of the most beautiful human beings I have ever seen, tall for a Bushman, his head shaved, showing a strong, domed skull.

His face was strong, too, a little heavy of bone, with a big jaw which he carried thrust forward and up so that he looked at you from the bottom of his eyes, a reserved gaze. His body was smooth and brown, built compactly, the body itself long in proportion to the arms and legs. Like all Bushmen, he was narrow of shoulder and hip, with a deep chest and a large belly, and when seen from the side as his belly relaxed he seemed wider from front to back than he was from side to side, very like a hunting animal whose chest is deep but narrow. Gai was also well dressed, not with a strip of leather like Ukwane, but with a beautifully designed, worked, and fringed loincloth with two wide tabs at the back which he could spread to sit on. He wore a band around his hips, too, as a belt for the loincloth, with a fringe of leather strips so long that when he sat down the fringe lay on the ground.

We asked them where they lived, and Ukwane, who was afraid to answer, said he was old and did not remember. Gai said they lived many days' journey to the east. We asked if the huts beside our camp belonged to them, and they said no, they had never seen them before, neither did they have the slightest idea how they came to be there.

We gave them some more tobacco as a gesture of our good faith and we told them that we had come from America, hundreds of days' travel and across a great body of water, but of course they had never heard of America or the ocean and thought we meant the Okovango River, and at that they didn't really believe us, although they were too polite to tell us so. "Merica," they said softly, with a beautiful, curled *r*, almost a *d* or an *l*. We said that we had come to visit them and to give them presents. We said that we were the friends of many Bushmen in the west where we had lived for a year, and had been given Bushman names, so we weren't entirely strangers. We told them the names, which made them smile, because of course they weren't Gikwe names, but Gai and Ukwane softened a little with this and admitted that, after all, the huts were theirs.

Finally they told us that a few nights ago they had been sitting at their fires, the two men, their wives and children, and one other family, when they had heard the sound of our

trucks, which had frightened them so that they had run off into the veld in all directions, taking nothing with them except the few possessions that had come first to hand. Ukwane, warming a little, said that he had been so terrified that he had crawled away on his hands and knees, afraid to show his head above the tops of the bushes.

Presently they had found each other again and had settled into a new place, although now they had no shelters. For the next days they had waited and listened, and when they had heard our truck leave they had assumed that we were gone, and had returned to get the rest of their things. Then they had noticed our trucks, and believing that they were surrounded and had fallen into our trap, they had come to surrender. Ukwane felt more relaxed and laughed at this, a warm, wheezy chuckle, showing a few teeth, slapping his chest and coughing from the smoke which he had been inhaling deeply. Seeing Ukwane, the rest of us laughed, too, but Gai only stiffened and smiled an icy smile. Behind his head the sun was setting, small and red, away over the edge of the flat plain, making all the little, distant trees against it look black and very lonely; and the new moon followed after into the salmon light, a heavy crescent flat on its back and bow-shaped, yellow and malevolent like the smile.

Before they went to sleep that night, the two men accepted a second bucketful of water as a present. The bucket they would return, but the water was for them alone, an enormous present in the desert, for which they were very grateful. They began to drink from it, scooping the water up with their hands and, later, lifting the bucket to drink from its rim. After that they lay down, naked as they were on the bare ground, close to the fire, with their knees bent, letting as much skin as possible be exposed to the heat. The warm smoke and ashes blew over them and they went to sleep on their sides as Bushmen always must, with one ear on the ground but with the other up and listening, to hear what comes along. Because it was cold they woke up often, and every time they woke they drank, so in the morning only the bottom of the pail had water in it, frozen into a circle of ice.

The next day the two men agreed to take some of us to

their werf, and we drove off with Ukwane in the jeep and Gai on the hood to point the way. From his higher position he noticed the long horns of a gemsbok in the grass and he signalled for the jeep to stop. Then he, John, and Theunis, taking a rifle, slipped out of the jeep and ran off after it, bent over and crouched so low that only their backs showed, as the backs of animals would, gliding above the grass. The gemsbok saw them and ran away toward a patch of heavy bush in the plain, the great V of horns a crown over its head. The men ran after, standing now, and in an hour they came back to where Ukwane and I were waiting, lying on our stomachs under the jeep to be in shade, saying that they had killed it. We drove to the spot where the gemsbok, a female, lay and brought her with us, a present to offer the other Bushmen.

We drove for several hours and at last we came to a wide plain, grown over heavily with small trees of slender trunks, with a few short branches sprouting leaves, like fence posts. Gai directed us to one of the smaller trees in the centre of the plain and told us to stop. He climbed down and looked around over the veld, then bent and picked up a small pipe, a piece of the leg bone of an antelope. He asked us for a match, lit his pipe, and smoked it.

At last we noticed on the other side of the tree two shallow depressions scooped in the sand and lined with grass, like the shallow, scooped nests of shore birds on a beach—the homes of the families, where the people could lie curled up just below the surface of the plain to let the cold night wind which blows across the veld pass over them.

Other than the depressions, except for a small pile of brown, twisted bean shells, no sign would show that people lived there. Later we saw another scooped pit and a stick thrust upright in the ground beside it, right at our feet, which was Gai's place; the stick was to mark the spot, although Gai could have found his shallow pit at any time of the day or night.

Nobody was there; everyone had run away. We sat down and waited while Gai put his hands to his mouth and shouted, trying to summon the people back again. When no-

body came or even answered him, he flung his pipe to the ground and marched off to find them among the bushes, alternately shouting to his hidden relatives and muttering to himself, for they might be far away and the day was getting warm.

We sat in the middle ground between the depressions so that we wouldn't risk stepping on or crushing anybody's hidden things, for, without knowing it, a European can in a moment trample through a Bushman's cache, breaking the delicate bone or wooden objects, bending the reed arrows, or crushing eggshell beads. Also, among certain groups of Bushmen, every fire has a man's side and a woman's side, determined by the position of the fire as you face the doorway of the scherm, the man's side being on the right, the woman's on the left. If a man sits on the woman's side, or where a woman has been sitting, he will become impotent and will also lose his power to hunt, and if a woman sits where a man has been sitting, she will get a disease in her vagina. Something intangible, invisible, but dangerously powerful, remains on the ground. We did not know which side was which of this werf's fires, or even for sure where the fires were; we did not even know that the Gikwe had this custom, for we had learned it from Kung Bushmen, but we knew that if they did they would not welcome our contaminating their ground. We would have liked to look around, but the best thing we could do was to keep our big boots and our bodies away from their delicate, fragile, almost invisible community.

In a short time we heard a rustle in the veld, and a young woman who seemed to be in her early twenties stepped from the bushes. She was, Ukwane said, Gai's wife, and on her hip she carried a baby, a naked three-year-old who looked at us from his wide eyes fearlessly, then, realizing that we were strangers, buried his face in his mother's arm. His mother stroked him calmly and came toward us smiling and nodding her head graciously, although a little pulse was hammering in the V of her throat. We learned later that she had been sitting in the bushes very near us, and when she had seen her husband go by she had assumed that everything was all right and had come to greet us, not bothering to answer his cries.

She was a short, sturdy woman with round arms, long thighs, and short calves. She had a rather large belly and square, strong shoulders, and she wore a very tattered cape or kaross over her back, with a small leather apron around her hips. She had no ornaments except a row of blue scars over her eyes, a decoration, and she had allowed her hair to become dishevelled, long, and a little tangled, hanging down over her ears in tight spirals, instead of having shaved it off as most Bushman women do. All this gave her a very matter-of-fact air, which was not deceiving, for she saw in a glance that we were harmless and, looking us over, sat down at once beside me.

Her baby pulled, twisted, and tugged at her, and from the way he behaved I judged that he kept her too busy to be forever cutting her hair or making bead ornaments. Besides, she told us later, if she wore ornaments, the baby pulled them off. She had her row of scars, though, delicate and arching over her brow, making her eyes seem wider; as well as a row of striped scars along her thighs. These, say Bushmen, are made to imitate the beauty of zebras, and many women wear them, having been decorated when they were still young. It is a painful procedure. The cuts are made on the thighs and forehead with a knife or axe blade, then charcoal is rubbed in, but the woman told us later that in her case it had been worth the pain and trouble because, she said, she was extremely ugly and had been made more beautiful.

Her baby's name was Nhwakwe, she told me, and after that we were at a loss for conversation. I offered her a cigarette, which she declined, indicating that it made her cough. I was surprised, for she was the only Bushman I had ever met, man, woman, or child, who did not smoke.

Presently she smiled, pressed her hand to her chest, and said: "Tsetchwe." It was her name.

"Elizabeth," I said, pointing to myself.

"Nisabe," she answered, pronouncing after me and inclining her head graciously. She looked me over carefully without really staring, which to Bushmen is rude. Then, having surely suspected that I was a woman, she put her hand on my breast gravely, and, finding that I was, she gravely touched

her own breast. Many Bushmen do this; to them all Europeans look the same.

"*Tsau si*" (women), she said.

Then after a moment's pause, Tsetchwe began to teach me a few words, the names of a few objects around us, grass, rock, bean shell, so that we could have a conversation later. As she talked she took a handful of the beans out of her kaross, broke them open, and began to eat them. This is a wonderful, bitter bean, shaped like a lima bean, which grows on tiny bushes in patches throughout the Kalahari. When you eat these beans they burn your tongue, throat, and stomach, but they take away hunger and thirst. Besides the beans in her kaross, Tsetchwe, who began unloading, brought out a large, edible root which she had dug up—she must have been gathering food before we came—and put it in the shade of a bush beside her fireplace. Also, she brought out six round green melons which are called *tsama* melons, and which, during the autumn, provide the only liquid available for all the Bushmen in the desert, and for all the game antelope besides. Under the green rind a *tsama* is very like a watermelon, filled with small oval seeds and very watery in texture, but is itself pale green and smaller, the size of a small cantaloupe. Tsetchwe placed one between her feet and, gripping it firmly with her strong toes, chopped a hole in the top of it with her digging-stick; then, lifting the cap away like the lid of a jack-o'-lantern, she mashed the pulp inside until it was liquid. She put the melon to her mouth and, tipping her head back, drank from it, using her long digging-stick to help push the pulp into her mouth, working it like an enormous chopstick, making a watery noise as she sucked. When Tsetchwe had collected a mouthful of seeds she put the melon down, took an old, dry *tsama* melon rind from her kaross, and spat the seeds into it to save them, for they can be roasted and eaten like nuts when they are dry. Tsetchwe drank all the liquid in the rind and seemed refreshed as she cast the empty rind over her shoulder and brushed off her mouth and hands.

At last Gai strode back into the werf, followed at a distance by a group of three small boys and, much farther, by

three old women who stood waist-deep in bushes, close together like three antelope, craning their necks to see us.

When they noticed Tsetchwe and Ukwane, they came forward with more confidence, accepted tobacco, and, squatting immediately, began to smoke. It had been months, Ukwane said, since they had used their last tobacco, had been reduced to smoking leaves, and they were very happy to have the tobacco we had given them. Bushmen love to smoke. They say that tobacco, as well as the wild beans, takes away hunger and thirst, and, besides that, it makes their hearts glad. One of the old women, Dasina, who was Tsetchwe's mother, inhaled too deeply and began to faint. Tsetchwe half turned her mother so that everyone would not see her, and, putting an arm around her for support, let the old woman lean on her shoulder. Our interpreter laughed, and Tsetchwe turned to glare. Tsetchwe's back was exactly like her mother's, broad but curved in at the waist, the old woman's a little bloated but Tsetchwe's young and strong.

Another old woman was smoking, too, puffing on a short, wide pipe cut from a leg bone of some large antelope, so big that she had to stuff one end with grass to keep the tobacco inside. She almost unhinged her jaw each time she puffed. She would inhale and spit, cough, and inhale again without a sign of dizziness, and when she saw Dasina faint she too laughed out loudly. Her name, she told us, was Twikwe.

Twikwe was skinny and tall as a man, with long, lanky arms that she flung about in the air, gesturing, and long legs that jerked when she walked. She wore only a short piece of leather that reached from her waist to her thighs, and we could see that she was wrinkled from head to foot, her skin hanging in long, vertical wrinkles down her thighs and belly, like an old apple that has dried. She talked incessantly and loudly, always opening and closing her mouth, and she joked, for Ukwane and the young boys near her laughed at everything she said. She was telling how her husband had out-distanced her as they were running away and was surely running still. Every now and then she stopped her talk to shout out to him, jeering, saying that he was depriving himself of tobacco and should come back; then everyone would listen,

but no sound came from him, no answer. He never did come back, and in the weeks we were there we never saw him. Perhaps he was running away from Twikwe, for we later learned that he was living in a valley with his other wife.

The third old woman was Ukwane's wife, and her name was Kuteru. She was the oldest of the four women by many years, and much the frailest; her arms and legs were spindly, and she was so thin that her slender bones stuck out. She moved slowly, feebly, and spoke in a high, thin voice like the piping of a little bird. She didn't even have the big belly that Bushmen usually have; instead, her belly clung to her backbone and she looked like a little, dry bird skeleton, ready to splinter or be blown away.

The other members of the group were the three young boys. One, Giamakwe, about eleven years old, was the son of Ukwane's old age, and the other two, Wite and Witabe, about ten and fourteen, were the sons of Twikwe and the man who ran away. All were extremely thin, with arms and legs like matchsticks, and each wore a tiny rag of a loincloth that had been cast off by someone else and cut down to their sizes—just tokens of modesty, as the boys were not covered up at all. But they were very gay and active; their shyness of us vanished immediately and was replaced by excitement; they whirled and spun like dervishes when they saw the gemsbok, played leapfrog, jounced each other, and ran circles around the werf, followed by the baby, Nhwakwe, who chased them like a puppy and could not keep up. He would tire from time to time, fall into his mother's lap to nurse, and then, refreshed, would rush headlong after the three boys again. He never did catch them, but this did not make him angry or make him cry.

When everyone was present, looking hungrily at the gemsbok on the jeep with a swarm of redheaded flies already at its mouth, Gai and Ukwane got their knives and rolled the gemsbok to the ground. She fell with a hard bounce, a thump as her legs or her long horns struck, and a huff as gas rushed from her open mouth. She lay stiffly, looking awkward with her hind leg raised, looking wild with her cocoa-coloured mane that stood stiff and straight along the bowed crest of

her neck, wild with her great horns sharp enough to prick your finger, and her pale, half-open eyes.

Gai squatted beside her and began to stroke her udder. He squeezed a teat and milk squirted into his palm, and as he licked it off, Ukwane squatted beside him. The gemsbok was big enough for both men to squat at her udder milking, Ukwane under her lifted thigh. I was told that when the men had first followed her, they had come upon a gemsbok calf wedged high up in the fork of a tree. A leopard had killed it and left it there, and as the men tried to climb the tree to pull it down, robbing the leopard, the mother gemsbok had reappeared and challenged them, so they had killed her instead. That is why her udder was filled with milk. Her beige hide, we noticed, had been raked by the leopard's claws.

Almost everyone came by with a palm outstretched for a squirt of milk. Ukwane called for me to come, too, and, stroking the milk veins in her udder the way one does when milking a cow, he milked a white stream into my palm which I licked away. The milk was strong and rank and gamy, not at all like the mild, sweet-tasting milk of cows. It smelled like the intestines, too, perhaps because the animal was dead, perhaps because the odour of intestines and the milk both came from the strong, harsh grass of the country. Yet it was liquid, and the Bushmen milked her dry.

Afterward, Gai and Ukwane butchered her, Gai preparing himself by casually sharpening his knife on her narrow, heart-shaped hoof. Always working so that her wounded side was up, they cut her skin free, not spilling a drop of blood. Near the carcass they dug a shallow pit, which they lined with the skin, hair side down, and as blood would well up into the cuts they made butchering, they would collect it and place it in this bowl. The carcass itself, now red and pink and white, they rolled onto a bed of leaves and branches to keep it clean and cut off the front and hind legs of the upper side, forming a bowl of the carcass so that no liquid would escape. They pulled out the intestine, cleaning each length carefully, first squeezing out all fecal matter, then turning the intestine inside out over a stick and scraping it clean. A lot of liquid

ran from the intestines, which was saved with the blood in the bowl of the body.

Next, the two men removed the rumen, the first stomach of ruminant animals, where the grass they bolt hurriedly is kept in quantities to be coughed up and chewed thoroughly when the animal is lying in the shade. Ukwane lifted the rumen out carefully, like a great water sack that might burst suddenly, and hurried with it to the pit lined with the skin. There he slit it and water gushed out, every drop saved by the skin. Ukwane and Gai removed handfuls of the contents, a yellow, pulpy mass of partially digested grass, and they squeezed each handful dry into bowls, tsama-melon rinds, and ostrich-egg water-containers that the women had brought forward. They did not mind two great white worms that were discovered living in the rumen, for as soon as enough water was collected, the people all had a long, satisfying drink. Some was pressed on me by Tsetchwe; I could not bring myself to drink it, but I did taste it and found that it was not too unpleasant, although it also tasted strongly as intestines smell. It was fresh, however, it was only the liquid from grass, and I thought that if I had no other water I too could drink the water of rumen.

Also, the people drank the blood, scooping it out in handfuls to their faces. Soon they were stained with it: the three old women looked very savage, and Gishe, our interpreter, asked Ukwane for some, which Ukwane gave him. Gishe said: "I have been living among Europeans for a long time, but I remember now who I am."

From the body of that gemsbok the Bushmen bailed out several bucketfuls of liquid, enough to supply them for almost a week. They cut the meat into strips which they would dry in the sun and use as they needed them, also enough for a week or perhaps even longer, as there were only a few people and the gemsbok was almost as big as a cow.

Tsetchwe had built a tiny fire beneath a tsama melon, an empty melon with the top cut away, and when she received her share of the meat—for any animal is divided at once by a rigid system of rules, some meat given to each person rather than kept as a communal supply or portioned to

families—she cut a small piece and stuffed it into the melon, where melon juice, heated through the rind, was boiling now. It cooked like meat in a stew, and when it was done Tsetchwe emptied the melon into a bowl, fanned it to cool it, and then ate some, putting a strip of meat into her mouth and hacking off a bite with her husband's knife. She was ravenously hungry and she ate almost all, while her baby, lying in her lap, nursed from her breast. The last piece she saved for him; she put one end of it into his mouth and, as he bit down, flashed the great knife under his nose to cut him a small enough morsel.

The gemsbok had vanished. All that remained from the butchering was the pile of squeezed, dry grass from the rumen and a few lumps of feces that the redheaded flies buzzed over. The meat, bones, head, hide, and brushlike tail all now belonged to people, and all the people had carried their portions away. Gai owned two hind legs and a front leg, Tsetchwe had meat from the back, Ukwane had the other front leg, his wife had one of the feet and the stomach, the young boys had lengths of intestine. Twikwe had received the head and Dasina the udder.

It seems very unequal when you watch Bushmen divide a kill, yet it is their system, and in the end no person eats more than any other. That day Ukwane gave Gai still another piece because Gai was his relation, Gai gave meat to Dasina because she was his wife's mother. After the meat had been divided again in this way and cooked, the cooked food was shared. No one, of course, contested Gai's large share, because he had been the hunter and by their law that much belonged to him. No one doubted that he would share his large amount with others, and they were not wrong, of course; he did. It is not the amount eaten by any person but the formal ownership of every part that matters to Bushmen.

It was already evening and the sun sat on the flat veld like an enormous, flaming mountain. It sank, and its orange colour was echoed in the three families' fires as the people warmed themselves and cooked their meat.

The following day the three young boys, feeling vigorous

with all the meat they had eaten, went out to play in the veld and came back at noon with a tortoise, a lizard, and a tiny rabbit, a baby one that they had been able to run down. The young boys would have had to divide any substantial game with the adults, but since these animals were so small the boys were allowed to keep them. Small animals are divided among the children and cooked for them by one of their parents.

Wite carried in the rabbit, still alive, across his shoulders, pretending that it was very heavy and that he was tired and worn, as though he were a hunter carrying home a buck. When he threw the rabbit down, a soft ball of gray fur with the innocent eyes of a baby and pretty, drop-shaped ears that were pink inside, it rushed at him and bit his finger. A dire fate awaited it; Ukwane caught it and pinched its throat.

The tortoise was given to Nhwakwe, the baby, as the spoils of a hunt are always shared, and Gai, his father, took it to roast it for him.

First, Gai scooped a shallow pit in the sand in front of his sleeping-place, which he filled with burning sticks. Beside him, old Twikwe held the tortoise on its back, but the tortoise urinated brown urine and Twikwe let it stand up. It stood looking at the flames, blinking its hard black eyes, then started to walk away. But Twikwe caught it again and held it, idly turning it over and over while she talked with Gai about other things, about smoke they had noticed on the southern horizon which Gai said was Bushmen's smoke. Gai said he planned to go to see the people some day soon, and as he spoke he took the tortoise from Twikwe and laid it on its back, where it rested with its feet out and its neck bent, in the position that would be correct, if it were standing. Gai took a burning stick from the fire and set it against the tortoise's belly. The tortoise kicked violently and jerked its head, urinating profuse amounts of the brown urine which ran over Gai's hand, but the heat had its effect, the two hard, central plates on the shell of the belly peeled back, and Gai thrust his hand inside. The smoldering shell reeked and the tortoise struggled violently, but Gai slit the belly with his knife and pulled out the intestine.

The tortoise by now had retreated part way into its shell, trying to hide there, gazing out from between its front knees. Gai reached the heart, which was still beating, and flipped it onto the ground, where it jerked violently for a moment, almost jumping, then relaxed to a more spasmodic beating, all by itself and dusty, now ignored. Gai pinched the gall away from the yellow liver and threw that away, but he left the liver and the surrounding fat because he meant for that to be eaten.

The baby, Nhwakwe, who owned the tortoise, came to sit by his father, leaning on Gai's leg and watching, looking smiling into the belly of the tortoise. A tortoise is such a slow tough creature that its body can function although its heart is gone. Nhwakwe put his wrists to his forehead to imitate in a most charming manner the way in which the tortoise was trying to hide. Nhwakwe looked just like the tortoise.

Gai frowned with concentration and worked with his mouth open, pulled down at the corners. When the intestines were removed, Gai stuffed the cavity with green leaves of the kind that "make your gums numb," say the Bushmen, added for flavour, I believe. The tortoise at this retreated far into its shell with its legs pulled in tightly, and Gai heated the doors again to curl them down. Then he packed the opening with grass and the tortoise's dung, capped it with a tsama-melon cap, and put the tortoise into the oven that was prepared for it like a shallow little grave which the tortoise just fitted, a final agony, for the tortoise once more kicked and struggled as Gai raked hot coals over it. The steam escaping from the moist flesh caused the ashes to bubble and boil, and it was over; the meat was in the pot.

Gai flung the intestines away and sat down near his wife to smoke, and I, who wished that they could at least have killed the tortoise first, thought of the story of Pishiboro and one of his wives, an elephant. Pishiboro is one of the names of God.

One night, when Pishiboro and his younger brother were sleeping, the elephant wife took them both and rolled them between her thighs, which caused them great discomfort. The younger brother said to Pishiboro: "Let us go away now

while it is dark. This wife of yours may want to kill us with her attention." So they got up and slipped away. Next morning, when they were far away from Pishiboro's house, the younger brother looked back and saw the elephant wife coming after them. "Run on," he said to Pishiboro, "and I will stay behind and talk with her." So Pishiboro ran on and the younger brother waited. When the elephant wife came up, the younger brother said to her: "I see that you have a big louse in your flesh there. Let me take it for you." The elephant wife agreed to let him, and Pishiboro's younger brother took a long thorn and pricked the elephant wife on her chest, right under her beads.

"Oh, you are hurting me," said the elephant wife.

"Don't flinch," said Pishiboro's younger brother. "This louse is very deep in your flesh." With that the younger brother pierced her heart and she fell dead.

The younger brother then built a fire, cut off the breast of the elephant wife, and roasted it. When it was cooked he sat up on the body of the elephant wife to eat it, and it was there that Pishiboro, returning to see what had happened, noticed him sitting way up over the tops of the bushes. "Ah, can it be," thought Pishiboro, "that my younger brother has killed my wife and is sitting on her body?" When Pishiboro ran forward he found that his worst suspicion was absolutely true.

Pishiboro was wildly angry, but his younger brother handed him some of the roasted breast, which presently Pishiboro ate. The younger brother looked down at Pishiboro and said in a voice filled with scorn: "Oh, you fool. You lazy man. You were married to meat and you thought it was a wife." Pishiboro saw that this was true, so he sharpened his knife and helped his younger brother with the skinning.

The Bushmen as well as the gods ignore the suffering of animals. When they opened the pit and took out the tortoise several hours later it did look delicious, and the meat, which came easily off the small, thick bones, smelled delicious brewed in the green leaves, and the thin young boys smiled

happily and brought their tsama rinds to be filled from the mortar where Gai put the pieces he had picked off and had pounded to make them even and small.

While there was gemsbok meat and tortoise meat, the rabbit was not worth eating, and it hung from the tree, where it dried, like a little husk, to be moistened again and eaten when nothing else was left. It swung in the breeze like a leaf, like a tiny, eerie ornament.

The lizard was eaten that evening by the three young boys, who built a fire of their own, where they sat like hunters back from a hunt; with the red light of the fire on their thin faces, making their eyes bright, they roasted the lizard in the coals and ate it, and pulled its tiny bones out of their teeth.

IV

THE FIRE

AFTER a long talk with Gai and Ukwane we found that, because of a shortage of melons and roots, they did not like to live at the place where we found them, which was called Gu Nu, and they were planning to move. We asked them if they would mind our coming with them when they did move, and they, with great aplomb, showing no surprise at what must have seemed a strange request, said politely that they would not mind at all. We had good relations with them by that time and had already been living near them for several days.

As we would be asking them to spend time talking with us, we agreed to give them food, water, and firewood to make up for what they might gather if we were not taking their time, as well as salt and tobacco to make their hearts glad. It seemed to be a good arrangement, and they were as pleased as we.

Soon after that, when Ukwane had decided where to go, we packed up our camp, they packed up theirs, and we put everything on the trucks and drove away. The Bushmen all rode with us except the two oldest women, Kutera and Dasina, who said they were too tired to ride and preferred to walk. They did, too, taking with them all their possessions as well as great loads of melons, all of which we offered again and again to carry for them, but because, they said, they might want to stop for the night or just refresh themselves along the way, they would not part with their bundles.

The place we went to was called Ai a ha'o; it was the pan where we had seen the lion. It took us almost all day to drive there, and shortly after we arrived Dasina and Kutera joined us, having travelled almost as fast as we. Those two old women

The Kung then abandon the grave immediately and forever, for when darkness falls the spirit blows down the wind and remains near its grave for an indefinite time. Whenever the Kung pass near the grave they blow *sasa* toward it to ensure their safety.

The Kung are so afraid of the spirits of the dead that they do not feel it necessary to remain as guardians of the grave, or even until they have "given up hope." Occasionally their custom proves unfortunate, as it has happened that the buried person rose from his grave and followed his people to their new camp. We ourselves knew a Kung Bushman who had died, been buried, and was resurrected; he clambered out of his grave at night, followed his band to their new camp, and rejoined his family to live out a happy life. It must happen rather often that people are mistaken for dead and buried accidentally—often enough, at least, to necessitate a word in the language, for those people who do revive and manage to dig out of their shallow graves are called the *twi*.

The spirit that does not become a *twi* does not remain alone by the grave forever, but is found by the great god in his wanderings over the veld and is taken to his home in the east. There it is hung in a tree and smoked in a medicine smoke until it becomes a *gaua*, a spirit of the dead, and can serve the great god as a messenger to bring disease and death to people, or to lead them to game and honey, depending on the great god's whim.

The Kung do not consider the *gauas* to be either happy or sad in their roles after life, but lonely and neutral, roaming above the veld either singly or in twos, on little paths of theirs, little invisible threads like spider webs, that run through the air. Whenever Bushmen have their great nighttime medicine dances, the *gauas* are present, just out of sight in the dark among the trees, and whenever there is a ring around the moon the Bushmen know that the *gauas* themselves are dancing, for the moon is their dance fire, the ring is the circle made by their dancing feet.

VIII

THE DANCERS

WHEN Bushmen dance their medicine dances, the medicine begins to work in the bodies of the medicine men. Medicine is warmed to potency as the exercise of dancing warms the shaman's body, and by the heat of the fire that the shaman dances around. The medicine purges evil and cures a sickness that is known to the Gikwe as "star sickness," a mysterious, magic sickness that has no tangible symptoms but together with evil is brought to people by the spirits of the dead. You can tell that powerful curing medicine is at work during one of these dances because the medicine men fall into trance, shudder and shriek and roll their eyes up into their heads, fall into the fire or wash their faces with flaming coals and are not burned, and when they rub their fire-warmed hands on you to cure you their hands are hot and dry and flutter like moths, and presently the star sickness leaves you, enters the bodies of the medicine men, and is shrieked into the air, hurled back to the spirits of the dead who brought it.

There are many types of medicine at work in the Kalahari, and every band among the Gikwe, Kung, or any Bushman nation possesses certain of these. Some bands, for instance, have the giraffe, rain, and gemsbok medicine. Others might have the ratel, fire, and gemsbok medicine. Ukwane's band had the sun, dove, and gemsbok medicine. Almost every band has the gemsbok medicine, for magically the gemsbok are very important animals, obvious from the black medicine markings on a gemsbok's face.

The medicine songs are songs without words and are given to both Kung and Gikwe Bushmen by the great god who sends his messengers, the spirits of the dead, to a sleeping

person. The spirits of the dead teach the person a medicine song in a dream, and when the person awakens he teaches the song to the other members of his band.

At dances, women sing the medicine songs, men dance and use the medicine to cure people, for almost all men are made medicine men when they are in their late teens, after they have been initiated into manhood, having shot their first buck. They are made medicine men by older medicine men, and although any Bushman man may become a medicine man, only certain of them find that they have strong healing power, and these are the ones who practise, who fall into trance at dances and chase evil from their people. Ukwane himself had been one of these. None of the people he cured ever died, he said, but as he grew old his powers seemed to leave him, so now he did not practice any more. In his band Gai became the strong healer.

Of course, a medicine dance is a great affair, for it usually takes place at night and lasts all night into the morning. Everyone in the band takes part, every young boy old enough to walk may dance, every young girl may sing with the women, and women themselves may dance if they feel inclined. People talk, eat, and smoke between dances, or go off to bed to sleep for a while, so, all in all, dances are social affairs as well as important curing ceremonies and might be called informal rituals, for everyone has a good time.

Underlying the gaiety and informality of a dance, however, is deep magic, taken very seriously by everyone, for using this magic is the way in which the Bushmen protect themselves from the dark forces in themselves and their country, the only way in which they can protect their lives from the evil of dissension, from thirst and starvation, from disease and death. In their dances the Bushmen defy the great god himself and his ominous messengers, the spirits of the dead.

To have a dance, the women sit in a circle with their babies asleep on their backs and sing the medicine songs in several parts with falsetto voices, clapping their hands in a sharp, staccato rhythm at counterpoint to the rhythm of their voices. Behind their backs the men dance one behind the other, circling slowly around, taking very short, pounding

steps which are again at counterpoint to both the rhythms of the singing and the clapping. Now and then the men sing, too, in their deeper voices, and their dance rattles—rattles made from dry cocoons strung together with sinew cords and tied to their legs—add a sharp, high clatter like the sound of shaken gourds, very well timed because the men step accurately. A Bushman dance is an infinitely complicated pattern of voices and rhythm, an orchestra of bodies, making music that is infinitely varied and always precise.

It is with great care and effort that this perfection is achieved, for the people learn the songs and dances when they are children and work for perfection in skill and timing all their lives. Even the dance rattles are carefully tended, hung from tree branches to preserve their dryness, their sharp sound, and a great deal of labour goes into their making. Gai's pair of rattles, which swung in the wind from the branch that shaded his dwelling, had about sixty cocoons on each rattle of the pair, and in each cocoon, from which the pupa had been carefully extracted and the cocoon closed up again, there were from ten to twenty fragments of ostrich eggshell, each fragment chipped to a uniform size and round. Each pair of rattles, of course, is expected to last a lifetime and more, and I'm sure that Gai's rattles were older than he.

The day before we left, Ukwane's band and the visitors from Okwa decided that since they were all together and in sufficient number, they would hold a dance. Perhaps it would purge the bad season or relieve the strain of jealousies they felt toward each other. Dances are usually held at night, but this time, out of consideration for us, they agreed to hold it during the day so that we could film it. We found a place which would be suitable for filming, helped gather sufficient wood because there would have to be a fire, no matter how hot the day was, and as we did all this the six young boys got more and more excited, tried on dance rattles, danced tight little circles around each other and tugged at the elbows of the adults, urging them to start.

Some of the women wanted to sing, others felt too hot, too tired, but the men walked among them encouraging them all. A dance is long, hot work for women, the pleasure of dancing

being mostly for the men. At last Twikwe and Dasina went to the spot chosen for the dance and, sitting side by side at the fire, their backs to everybody, sang a few bars and began to talk, then sang a little more, joined now by Tsetchwe, who sat beside them and began to sing in earnest. All three of them looked so small down in the grass and set up such a loud noise singing—for in order to interest the other women they were shrieking the song at the top of their voices—that they seemed like three tree frogs or three cicadas, hard to notice in the landscape but putting forth earsplitting songs.

At last a few more women joined the singers and the singing mounted, the voices took on several parts. At last the men began to join, dancing toward the circle in twos and threes, moaning the song in their throats, leaning on long staffs, their coming heralded by the dry, loud staccato of their rattles.

The men came from different directions, and they stood so tall and danced so strongly, with their muscles standing out of their necks, that their coming was like the coming of bull antelope, they were so radiant of strength and tension, they were so lithe and male. They came together out of the trees and, without the slightest change of pace, arranged themselves around the dance circle, wheeling slowly, one after the other, and the dance began.

The air was hot, the sun was shining strongly, the fire was sending a shuddering cloud of heat around the dancers, and as the dancers moved almost imperceptibly faster and faster, Gai suddenly flung his arms into the air and with a piercing shriek crashed to the ground. He landed stiffly with a bounce, his head cracking. On the ground he writhed and groaned, and Ukwane pulled him by the arms to remove his body from the dance circle.

Gai was in deep trance. Ukwane was ministering to Gai's body because Gai's spirit had rushed away.

Bushmen say that when the medicine in a medicine man becomes stimulated by a dance, warmed by the fire and by the heat of the man's body, the man's spirit may leave him, causing his body to fall because there is nothing there to hold it up, and fly into the veld, where it seeks out the evil that is troubling people. Some medicine men in this way have seen

the spirits of the dead, some have seen the great god. At another dance we once attended, one man's spirit rushed into the veld, where it came upon a pride of lions that had been troubling the people by their constant presence and by their deafening roars at night. The man's spirit spoke with the lions, defied them, and ordered them away, and the lions did go; they troubled the people no longer.

When the spirit returns, the medicine man comes to himself, as Gai did presently. He stood up and ran into the veld, gaining speed as he went. Far out in the veld he screamed, a shriek of defiance, then turned and charged back toward the dance fire. He passed through the dance like a wind through dry leaves; the people ducked aside and shrank away from his feet, then settled together when he had gone by. Gai shrieked again, turned himself, and rushed back, charging bull-like toward the fire again; this time Ukwane seized his arms and though Gai ploughed forward, Ukwane hung on, dragging behind with all his weight, until at last Gai fell headlong into the dance fire and his hair burst into flames.

Ukwane snatched him out and slapped out the fire in his hair, and Gai, his mouth open and his eyes quite wild, sparks still falling from his head like stars, strained against Ukwane's hands. At last he broke away.

In a moment he bent slowly over the fire and washed his hands in the flames, then went to one of the women in the circle of singers and, placing one hand on her chest, the other on her back, shuddered and groaned as he sucked the evil from her, then straightened suddenly and shrieked the evil into the air. In this way Gai cured all the people, followed as he went by Ukwane, who now held Gai's arm to keep him upright. Before long, Gai had fallen again exhausted and was dragged by the ankles to a place in the shade.

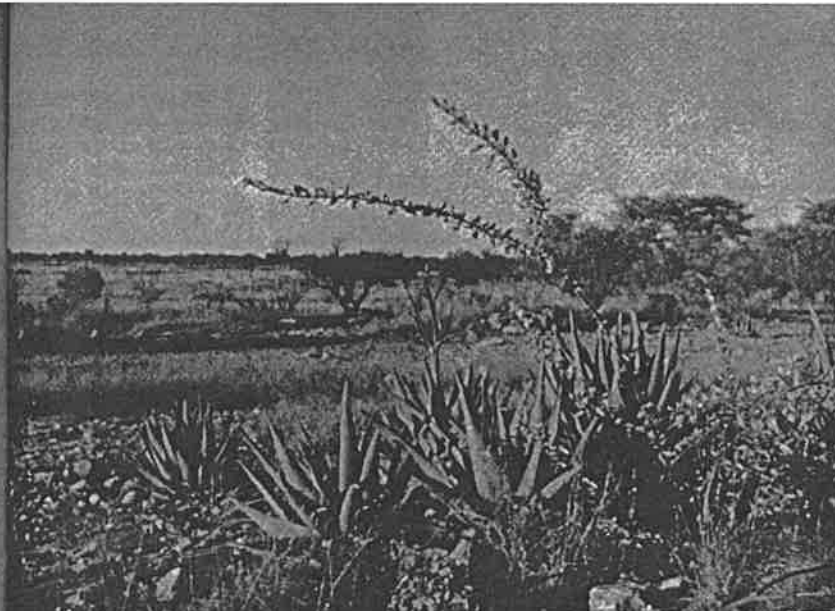
I looked at him and saw that his eyes were closed, his eyelids puffed, and thought he seemed unconscious. His breath came rasping through his mouth and nose, and his pulse, showing in "the heart's place," seemed very quick. But he was all right; no one paid any attention to him as they would have had he not been well. His baby came to watch him, though, and gazed down into his swollen face.

It was very hot. The dancers and the women singing steamed with perspiration, first becoming gold in colour, then ash-white as dust stuck to them. Soon the women felt that they had sung enough, their feelings showing clearly in the diminished vigour of their songs, until finally the singing faded out entirely and the dance stopped. The men, complained, but the women would sing no more and presently everyone had drifted away, leaving only the children wheeling slowly around the track worn by the dancers' feet, dancing soberly, carefully, without music, and Gai, who now lay prone and forgotten in the dust, in the shade of a little tree.

Hours later, when even the children had wandered back to the werfs and had joined their parents, who were tired from the exercise and were taking afternoon naps, Gai came to himself once more; he sat up and wiped his face, got slowly to his feet, and walked slowly home to sleep, next to his wife beside their fire.

All the Bushmen were asleep but Twikwe. Some people lay on their backs with their arms shading their eyes, their mouths open, some on their bellies, their arms and legs sprawled. All the young boys except Giamakwe lay like puppies, tangled together in a knot of arms and legs, for even in sleep they would not be parted. Giamakwe slept at a little distance from the others on his side with his body bent backward into a U, his head almost touching his buttocks, as limp and supple as a young snake or a young cat that drapes over your hand. Even Nhwakwe was fast asleep, lying on his belly and using as his couch his father's body, his head on his father's chest. Both were deep in slumber, Nhwakwe snoring a loud baby snore, saliva from his open mouth moistening Gai's dark skin, but Gai absolutely silent in the fast, still sleep of a hunter. Only Twikwe was not sleeping. She lay on her belly with her chin propped up with one hand as she built a precarious little toy hut out of strips of bark, carefully, the way one builds a card house. When I came by to look at the people she looked at me with her amused, wise-woman's eyes.

In the afternoon the young boys naturally woke up first, as they were so entwined that the movement of one was bound to wake the others, and began sleepily to delouse each other,



The aloes and the spiny plants of the desert. Far away, on the horizon, two baobab trees are showing

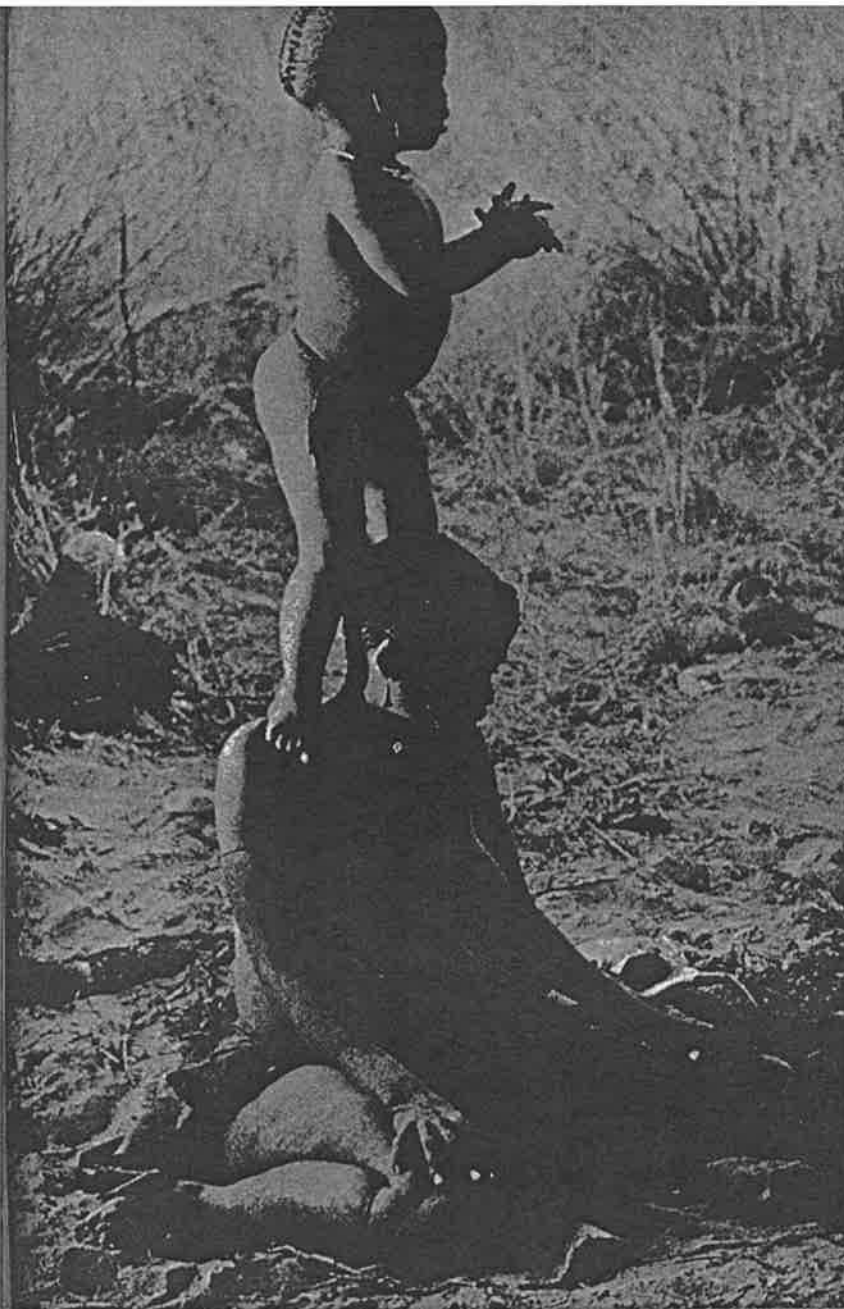
Gai was afraid of us at first. He listened carefully to everything we said, but he would not speak





Ukwane eats a tsama melon, the source of food and all water for Bushmen during the drought

This is Gai's house, this bare sand under the branch of a tree

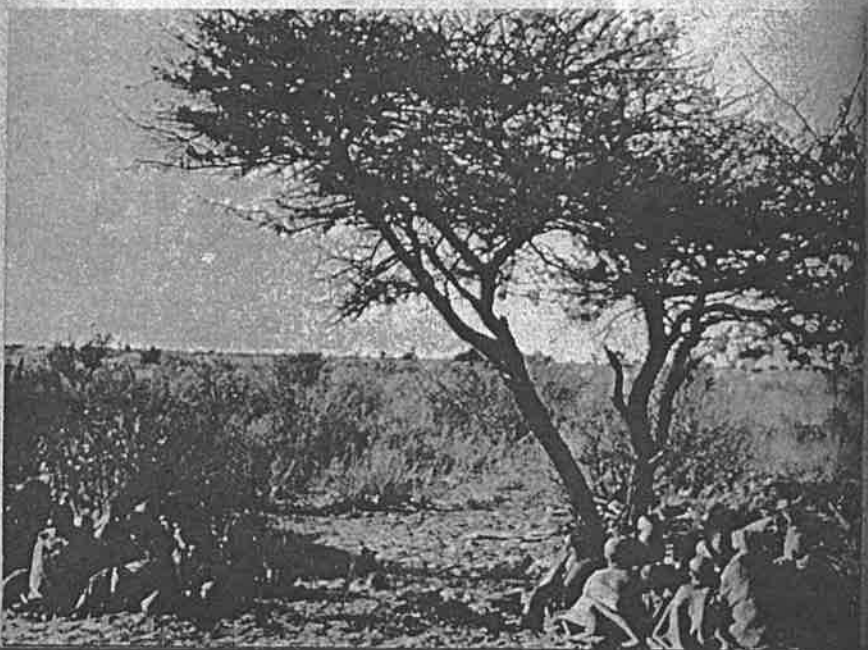


He climbed to her shoulder and stood there triumphantly without holding on, gazing around like a child on a hill



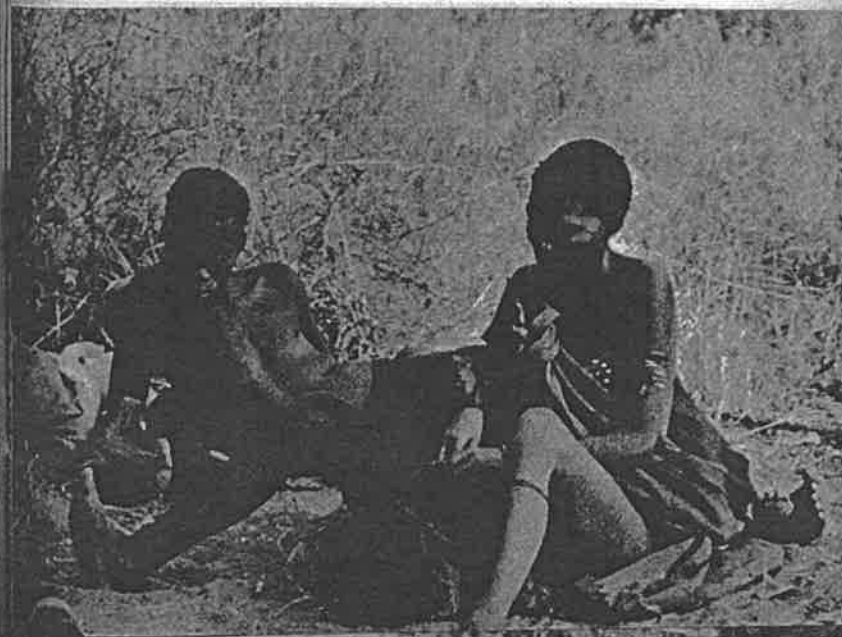
The jealous men from Okwa

The people from Okwa camped right beside Ukwane; the two werfs were shaded by the same little tree



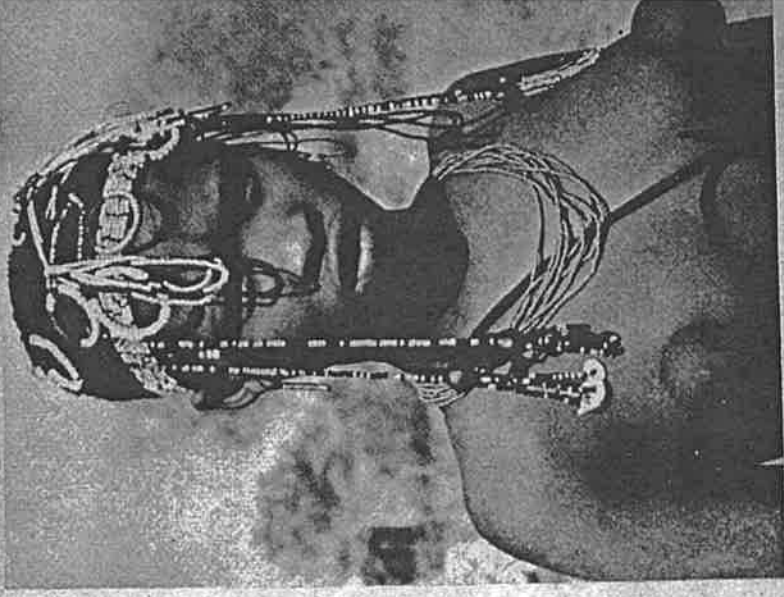
I sometimes received presents of gum from trees, or soft, sweet caterpillars

Crooked Kwi and his wife, who once had run away from him





Beautiful Ungka's cousin, and the little girl who was content to follow her and be her handmaiden



Beautiful Ungka, the lily of the field

Tu made Noma clothes of ostrich-eggshell beads, an art taught Bushmen by the genshok people



The old man who had never shot a buck, who had never married, now almost blind, too thin, and without people





The shining lake of Nama

*In the middle of the circle the great tree rose, pink-skinned and mighty,
the claimer of two lives*



taking turns in pairs, one lying with his head in his partner's lap while his partner searched through his hair, catching and biting the lice he found. Then they cut each other's hair with a razor blade they had got from someone in our expedition, cutting away certain tufts of hair and leaving certain others until patterns on each head were formed, ranging from scalp-locks to rather fine designs. One boy had only two tufts left on his entire scalp, one on each side, like a pair of horns; another boy had an egg-shaped pattern of tufts but with two holes of bare scalp showing so that when he bent his head he accidentally presented an oval face with a pair of staring eyes. All the patterns were supposed to be geometric, never intentionally having fantastic or representative designs. Wite's head was shaved entirely, his partner having shown no imagination at all; and his bare head made his ears seem even larger and more pointed, his face more elfin even than before.

It was a gray, hazy afternoon. Below the fine overcast were clusters of little white clouds all grouped together like white flowers. In the west a great cloudbank was gathering, an ominous sign.

Later, when the young boys had dispersed to play horse and rider, Ukwane took his bow and played a few songs. He played "Bitter Melons" again, and "A Song of Shouting," and one other song about Kutera, his wife. Both the last song and its subject were very simple, the song itself having only three or four notes and a gentle rhythm. It was composed by Ukwane one chilly night because he had asked Kutera to gather firewood during the afternoon, but she had refused. That night Ukwane had been cold because there was no fire.

Ukwane sang and played in the shade of a tree, and over his head the birds in the branches were also singing. Everything seemed very peaceful, very quiet under the hazy sky; the west wind moved the grass, yellow as young wheat, and blew the sounds of people speaking, the sounds of the young boys playing, and the fragrance of the great veld over us. The strain among the people seemed to have gone; they had held a dance together, their children were playing calmly; there was, for a time, enough to eat, as the gemsbok had not yet been quite devoured; and all these things seemed to relax

the people, allowing them to see each other in more favourable lights. Their naps and their soft singing showed their relaxation, and we were glad, for we had become so fond of Ukwane and his people that we did not like to think of them abandoned by the Okwa people or involved in strife.

We were loading our trucks because we planned to leave before dawn. At the end of the afternoon all the Bushmen had drifted into our camp to watch us, and Tsetchwe helped me pack. I cut my finger on the sharp edge of a box and when she saw me trying to wipe the blood away she told me to wait, so I did, and when the blood was dry she scratched it all off with a stick.

We gave her presents, and presents to all the people there. We gave blankets to the people in Ukwane's band, long strings of white beads to everyone, metal to make knives or spearheads, tobacco and pipes, salt and candy and all the water their containers would hold, all they could drink, and even enough water to wash in, for we had enough to take us to a waterhole a few hundred miles away where we could fill our drums. They did wash. Gai washed his whole body and emerged a shining gold. The others washed their arms and faces, modestly preventing their washing the rest, leaving them with golden arms and oval golden masks.

Tsetchwe was pleased with her presents—she hung her white beads in her hair and wrapped herself in the blanket, which, she said, was far softer than leather and which would not get stiff in the rain—but she did not seem happy. She spent the evening sitting beside me, for though we could not talk much with each other I knew that she liked me. "I will cry when you are gone," she said.

The two horses, formed by the six young boys, came prancing by, the riders riding loosely, the front feet of the horses galloping but the hind feet, because of the heavy load, trotting up and down. One horse disintegrated in front of us and the young boys who had formed it came forward slowly. The rider, a young boy from Okwa, seemed to want to ask me something. He was very shy, but finally he mustered his courage. "Are you a woman?" he said.

Ordinarily, he would have been too polite to ask a per-

sonal question, something which Bushmen almost never do because to them asking questions implies distrust, but it may be that on the day before our departure he had found his curiosity impossible to resist. Tsetchwe frowned at him, but I said: "Yes, I am."

The horse had been arguing with the rider, and the two boys who had been the front and hind legs seemed quite triumphant. "We told you so," one said.

A great thunderhead was rising in the west which would probably disperse before morning, and the sun set into it, turning the whole horizon a pale and delicate rose. We built up our fires and at the werv the Bushmen built up their fires and when it was dark our fragment of the veld was rather gay with firelight. A huge star, Fomalhaut, appeared in the southeast, as it did every evening. Tonight it looked as big as the moon and blue in the haze, but very dim, getting smaller and brighter as it rose.

Ukwane played his songs for us and said again that he would wait for our return, living beside our track, and if his son should come to visit him he would wait no longer but would follow our track to find us again somewhere.

We told him that under no conditions should he do any of this, for he would never be able to find us and we would probably never come back. He nodded, and we believed that he would not wait, but then again perhaps he did. Perhaps he is there now.

We got up before dawn in the morning and stamped out our fires and threw our bedrolls on top of the trucks. When it came, it was the pinkest dawn that I have ever seen and when the morning wind rose we shivered. I found a few coals left in a fire and tried to warm my hands, and when Wite saw what I was doing he crouched beside me and showed me how to pick up just one coal, roll it between the palms, and then hold the warm palms against the face. I tried it and of course was burned, but Wite patiently did it again and again, hoping that I would learn. His palms were flat and calloused almost as thickly as the soles of his feet. Twikwe, Tsetchwe, and Nhwakwe came to sit beside us and we waited together

in silence until the trucks were ready. When I got up to go they got up too and Twikwe shook my hand and kissed me with a great smack, doing at this moment what she had seen Europeans do, not what Bushmen do, for they just wave calmly at each other, if that. But Tsetchwe turned her back to me and would not say good-bye. Even among her own people she was lonely, for in her band there was no young woman but herself.

We climbed into our trucks and started the motors. Uk-wane called out to us with great sincerity to wish us rain on our journey, a very generous wish, for though his people might suffer from it, it would cool the air and we might even be able to collect enough for a drink. We thanked him, of course, and he repeated his wish again. The trucks started to move and when they did Tsetchwe waved at last, and, lifting her baby to her hip, she waved his hand too, and so we left, and drove away in the direction opposite the one we had come from, over the plains, flatter and wider and longer here than we had ever seen, sloping miles and miles away to tiny trees on the horizon which were farther away than anything we had ever seen before except distant mountains, the earth from a plane, or stars. At noon, many miles from Aj a ha'o, we saw great herds of game, thousands of animals grazing together, and we regretted that the Bushmen were not near the game, or the game not near the Bushmen, for the people could have been feasting, and then we passed through the game into empty plains again, where we saw nothing but grass except once when we saw a plant very like a tumbleweed which leaped over the ground and then was caught by the wind and lifted higher and higher into the sky up against the clouds. It made us sad to see it flying there, the only moving thing in all the country. "It is the plane to America," the interpreter said.

In the evening when we camped, the sun set into a little dome of its own pink light, and in front of this minute sunset we saw whirlwinds crossing. Later, when the darkness came, we even saw a ring around the moon with red at its outer rim, and on the following day it did rain, something that happens only rarely in the month of July.

IX

PEOPLES OF THE VELD AND SKY

AFTER many days, during which we crossed the rest of the great central desert of Bechuanaland, we came to a strip of fertile country which is in both Bechuanaland and South-West Africa and is owned to a large extent by the Chuana people, who have great cattle ranches, vast areas of grazing-land, and rather small villages. In this fertile land is Lake Ngami, a flat marsh or even a dry pan at most seasons, but when we saw it, it was filled with water, something that had not happened since Livingstone was there.

The country had changed greatly since we left the central desert. In the fertile land there were forests, thorn thickets, even little hills. At some places there were vast grasslands with grass higher than the hoods of our trucks, but in other places livestock had eaten away everything, cattle having devoured the grass, goats having chewed the leaves from the bushes. We saw five or six great herds of cattle grazing on the flat land surrounding Lake Ngami, where the grass was short and green and looked kept, like a park. There were perhaps a thousand cattle in each herd, and mixed with the cattle were herds of springbok, a few ostriches, and marabou storks. It was pastoral Africa, for the path we followed was marked with the hoofs and dung of the cattle, tracked by the huge ox-drawn, forked log sledges of the Chuana farmers, and now and then patterned with the footprints of a jackal, a hyena, or even a leopard or a lion, for although there are great herds the country itself is wild.

Lake Ngami was an enormous, shining expanse of water a few square miles in area and very shallow everywhere. We got out of our trucks and went to the water to rest our eyes

with so much luxury and we found that the water was warm, full of brow duckweed, and swarmed with innumerable tiny flies. Ducks and geese were swimming, storks and flamingos were wading at the edges, and while we were looking the largest herd of cattle that we had ever seen came to the lake to drink. There were hundreds upon hundreds of them drifting toward the lake, and the noise of their hoofs was like the sound of a tornado, a great waterfall, thunderous and mighty. A Chuana was riding among them and it took him nearly an hour, travelling in a straight line, to pass through the herd, the cattle parting a little as he came to let him by. He rode on and on, and when we left he was still riding, still among the cattle, and still not out of sight.

We left Lake Ngami and its vast pastoral lands and went on until we were away from the Bantu farmlands, over the border of Bechuanaland into the Kalahari Desert of South-West Africa, which at that place is called the Nyae Nyae area. This country we knew very well, for it was here that we had lived a year among Kung Bushmen, and although it was a desert it was also totally unlike the great barren steppes of central Bechuanaland, as it was quite rolling, marked by large forests of small trees, by little rolling hills, by omarambas, and by pans, which in the rains were shallow lakes and in the drought were clay flats. The land was still very open and tilting, but the low hills and the forests veiled the great sweep of country, and the sun, the moon, and the horizon.

As soon as we were there we felt very familiar, very at home. We knew quite a lot about Kung Bushmen, who in ways are different from Gikwe Bushmen—as the country is not as harsh, the Kung are a little grander, living together in larger numbers because they have veld food more abundantly, a little more extravagant with their time and their possessions. They build themselves grass huts or scherms, at least during the rains, and though they know vast sections of their country perfectly, being quite sure of the whereabouts of game and certain of the whereabouts of different types of veld food, they do not have to memorize the whereabouts of each root individually and store this information in their

minds for future seasons, as the Gikwe do. The Kung are diligent and powerful hunters, although in some respects their country is harder to hunt in than the land of the Gikwe, more overgrown with brush and trees. But the Kung have metal-tipped arrows and complicated poison, and the men make a point of hunting often and well because their people love meat.

We knew their rolling veld with its baobab trees and hidden waters, for in Nyae Nyae the people do not have to scrape roots and suck melons, but are the possessors of deep waterholes where they can drink clear water almost all year long. We knew which stalks among the grass blades marked edible roots, and where game antelope might be found.

We knew not only the veld but the beings that live in the sky above it, and knew the beings under the earth and in the four directions. We knew where the great god lives in the east with his tree and his medicine smoke with which he makes spirits of the dead from dead people. We knew his names, for besides his usual, everyday name, Gao Na—which means Big Gao, Gao being simply a man's name—he has many other hidden, secret names that may never, never be spoken during the light of day but only at night and only then at dances. Some of these names are Haishi, Gao ha, Nao, and Gara, and if he hears one of these names being called he will come to see who called it. He does not like to be disturbed during the day, he does not like the hot sun, and if a person bothers him during the day he will make that person sick. He is called at dances and cursed for the things he does to people, and some medicine men have even seen him when they were in trance; he appeared once as a yellow mouse, once as a gray man the size of a mouse, and once as a cloud of mist, although these are not his usual forms; usually he is the size and shape of a man, but, the Bushmen say, because he is wild he is always seen far away.

We knew of his wife, whose name is Khoana, a Kung Bushman woman's name, but who is also called the "Mother of Bees," and we knew of the being who lives in the west, whose name is also Gao Na and who is both the namesake and the servant of the great god, bringing good and evil to

people as the great god chooses. This god of the west can also do things to people on his own initiative, and people sometimes say that evil comes when the two gods disagree.

There is one more figure, another being who has no place, such as the east or west; another god whose relation to the gods of the east and west has not been formed. His name is Gaua; he is called by the same name as the gaua si, the spirits of the dead, and though to the Kung today his identity has become vague, we felt that he well might be an older, primal figure, a god whose being has been now infused with the gods of the east and west. Today the great god of the east is sometimes called Gaua, called by the old god's name, and when he is, it is because he has brought evil, sickness, catastrophe, or death.

The old god still exists, the Bushmen know him, but his presence is diffusing; he, the old power of evil, is becoming faint, his entity obscure.

In the west live the *kwa kwa kwara* (knee knee nothing), the people with no knees. These people have no knee joints, but must stand up always. At night when the sun sets, the people with no knees catch it and kill it, for the sun is meat. They put it in a pot, and when it is cooked they tell their children to run off and play, and when the children are gone the people with no knees eat it. When the children come back, the people with no knees pick their teeth and give what they remove to the children, and then the people with no knees take the shoulder blade of the sun and throw it back into the east again, where a new sun grows and rises in the morning. If a tall man throws it you are aware of nothing, but if a short man throws it you can hear it whirring overhead. We knew a Kung Bushman man who, said he, had been to the west and had visited the people with no knees. He had been very interested to see them and very curious to know how they slept at night, for he did not imagine that they could lie down, so when darkness came he had watched and waited, and, just as he had suspected, when they had finished the sun they did not lie down but leaned against forks of the trees, where they rested, propped.

In the north is a great river, the Okovango, and Bantu peo-

ple live there. In the south live the gemsbok people, who are not ordinary gemsbok but beings in gemsbok form. It was these beings who taught the Bushmen how to make ostrich-eggshell beads, for when making a bead the gemsbok people use their long horns to bore the hole in the center. The gemsbok people often wear strings of beads around their necks. The gemsbok people look just like gemsbok. When Bushmen are hunting they must be very careful not to mistake these people for ordinary gemsbok, because if a hunter should shoot a gemsbok person even by accident he would get very sick and die. But such accidents are rare, for if a group of gemsbok people are out grazing and notice that a Bushman hunter is drawing his bow at them, they will say to him: "Do not shoot us, we are not gemsbok," and the hunter will naturally leave them alone.

Under the world is another world just like this one, with trees and omarambas, hills and pans, a sun and a moon, Bushmen, Bantus, and Europeans just like the people here, and the bottom of our world is that world's sky. There is no other connection between our world and the lower world except possibly through certain deep waterholes, for it was through a waterhole that the great god climbed from that world when he first came here.

Over the world, of course, is the sky, and there is nothing above that. The sun, which is not only meat but a death-giving agent because it burns the veld and dries up the waterholes, is a male, and the moon when it is full is female. A crescent moon, called *nui ma ze* (moon small new), is male, and so are the great destructive thunderheads that bring hailstorms or electric storms which break down dwellings and flatten the grass. The soft gray clouds that carry land rains which blow like mists into the plants of the veld and make them grow are female. The rain of male and female clouds is itself male or female, depending on the cloud's gender or on whether the rain is creative or destructive, but if you can't tell from the rain as it falls you can tell from its footprints, for male rain leaves sharp, pierced marks in the dust and female rain leaves wide, soft splashes. And as for the stars, they are called by some the eyes of dead people and by others are

said to be ant lions which at night rise from the bottoms of their little traps of sand.

Since we had lived a year in Nyae Nyae we knew the round of the seasons, which Kung Bushmen say are six in number. We came there in July, in winter and the start of the drought, the coldest season. August was bitterly cold and also dry, but in September the air began to get warmer and heralded the next season, called "little winds before the rain," a season of whirlwinds, drought, and clouds of dust. In October, suddenly and presenting a startling sight, a thorn tree near our camp turned quite green and the heat began to be intense. This was the start of the springtime, the driest, hottest time of all the year and a time of starvation, for the water in the waterholes gets very low until only a little remains on the bottoms and the wild roots push sap into their vines so that the vines turn green and sprout but the roots themselves are shrivelled. This was the worst season of the year for the people. Before this, during the winter, the large extended band that we had gone to visit was separated into little family groups that were scattered through the veld, living at little waterholes that did not keep their water all year long. During the dry season the water in these waterholes vanished, causing the small family bands to gather at the last sure waterhole of the area, a waterhole called Gautscha, which was beside a huge flat pan called Gautscha Pan.

There was one rather large band that always lived at Gautscha and numbered some forty people, who divided themselves into sometimes three, sometimes four family groups. They thought themselves lucky to live there, for Gautscha was considered to be a sort of paradise, where the waterhole was cool and deep, and (it was said) game gathered at all times to lick the salt, for Gautscha was a salt pan. It was the salt that made Gautscha most desirable, because salt is greatly esteemed and is gathered from the crust of the pan in moist balls. Bushmen sprinkle the surface with water in order to roll up just the first layer where the salt lies. When the salt balls dry, Bushmen crumble them into their food, preferring salt to all sweet things and honey. Once when we asked some of the Gautscha people what they called themselves they re-

plied with this phrase: "We are a salty people, who come from a salty place."

In the dry season, two hundred people came to Gautscha and lived in the bushes at the edge of the pan. This was an enormous number for any area to support, but all had indisputable rights to be there, for either their fathers had drunk at Gautscha or they had relatives whose fathers had; by the rather complicated system, any Bushman may drink water and gather veld food wherever his parents had a right to do so, or may live with either his parents, his brothers or sisters, or his wife at any place where the relative of his choice has rights. There was water but not much food at Gautscha, and all the people got thin and very hungry and sat around their fires at night with sweat pouring from their bodies but with nothing to eat; to make matters worse, one man coming for a visit proved to be ill and gave his disease to everyone. It was a disease that caused vomiting, high fevers, chest pains, and nosebleeds of great intensity—a woman whom I tried to cure bled all one morning with blood squirting from her nostrils, pouring down over her arms and hands and dripping from her elbows, making a dark pool on the ground. The disease struck all the people, from the youngest infants to the oldest grandparents, and all the people lay for days scattered all over the ground, too ill to move. We did everything we could, of course; we provided food and medicine, firewood and water, and took turns staying up all night to nurse the people. As it happened, everyone got better within fourteen days, although not all were completely cured; and many, feeling that their luck was very bad at Gautscha, decided to take their chances at other places in the veld where, although there was no water, there were watery roots that could be scraped for moisture. One day many of the people walked away in single file, taking their belongings and carrying on their backs their relatives still too sick to travel, leaving Gautscha Pan deserted except for the three small family bands who made their permanent home there.

One day when we were travelling in the veld about twenty miles from Gautscha we came upon an old man lying on his face on the sand in an open place. He was a member of one

of the bands at Gautscha that tried to escape bad luck, and, thinking he was hurt, we stopped at once. But he was not hurt; when we came near him he did not get up, but turned his face away from us and lay as if dazed, pressing one hand to his forehead. We knew him; he was the only Bushman of any nation we had ever met or even heard of who had never married, this because Bushman men must shoot a buck and undergo initiation before they can marry, which he had never done. Instead he lived with his sister, who took care of him and provided him with food, and who had been very ill during the plague at Gautscha. As we looked at him the headman of that band stepped out of the bushes and told us that the old man was not ill but grieving for his sister, who lay dead in a grove of thorn trees a little way beyond. The old man, who had been alone with his sister when she died, had been too weak from the illness to bury her, and had only been able to hide her body under a pile of stones. When the other members of the band had returned to the grove after a day or so of veld food-gathering it had been too late, too dangerous because of the now roaming spirit, for them to assist the old man with a funeral, and they had had to abandon his sister's body as it was.

The headman lifted the old man from the ground and we saw that he had not been weeping but had only been lying inert and helpless, powerless now to keep himself erect. On our truck he lay just where we put him, motionless, prone, all the way back. We passed the grove where his sister lay, a grove of high white trees with red beans on their branches, and the old man did not turn his head to look.

After that, the situation for the people who remained at Gautscha got better because the summer came. Great cloud-banks like mountains formed at the horizon, dispersed themselves in brown haze, and formed again, getting larger day by day. Some of the bands who had left Gautscha began to return and once again the countryside was populous, the air filled with the murmur of voices and the smell of smoke from the many fires. Some of the men went hunting and shot a giraffe, so there was lots of meat for a while.

One day some of us went to a place called Kubi Pan to see

a cheetah that was supposed to live there, but instead we saw a flock of guinea fowl walking along in single file as people do, raising a cloud of dust. Two of them began to fight because it was their mating season. When we got to Kubi it was evening and the clouds on the horizon were very thick, and just when the sun set into them the full moon rose on the other side, causing a balance of the two great bodies over the earth.

It seemed to be an auspicious night. On the way home we felt something electric in the air and when we got to Gautscha the moon had risen high and pale in the clouds and we found that the Bushmen were dancing the rain dance. Everyone was there, the women all singing and the men wheeling in a circle around the dance fire, the clouds of dust rising under their feet making them look like spectres in the eerie light between the fire and the moon. The dance was very powerful. The men wheeled faster, the singing mounted in pitch. A medicine man coming from a far werf and singing as he came sprang among the dancers like a leopard, soft-footed and fine, and as he looked around him for a moment before beginning to dance, the moon behind his head filled a white ostrich feather in his hair with light. He smiled to himself, then, dancing suddenly, led the other dancers in a serpentine track through the circle of women, over the fire, and out the other side. The wind blew hard along the ground, and the smoke and fire streamed into the veld. The singing was very hard, very fast, and as the dancers swung around the circle dancing harder and faster, it suddenly began to rain.

It was like a miracle. It was the first rain of the year. First, there were just a few drops, but soon it was raining steadily in gusts behind the wind, causing the dancers to relax a little but to continue their dancing without paying attention to the fact that they were drenched. A bolt of lightning illuminated the veld for miles around with a blue-green light not of this world, showing all the trees and bushes stark and rain-lashed in the grass, then a blast of thunder as the light went out which struck us deaf as the lightning had struck us blind. For a moment it was black and still except for the lashing rain, and in the silence we heard a lion roaring far out in

the veld, answered by another lion which was a little nearer, and then a peal of thunder shook them silent, drowning even their great voices.

The people had not danced to bring the rain; they had known that rain was coming and had danced to use its strong medicine. It rained all night, the rain so drenching and torrential that it put out the dance fire and drove the dancers into their scherms, and in the morning there was a lake of shining water on the pan and lilies growing everywhere; where only their dry leaves had been before.

After that the rain came often. Some weeks it rained a little every day, some weeks the rain became torrential and flattened the Bushmen's grass scherms, but it made the veld rich and green, with flowers everywhere and all kinds of fruit, which grew on trees and stalks and bushes. The pan became the home of shore birds, marabou, storks and flamingos. Leopards and lions drank there, game antelope waded through it, leaving deep tracks in the mud, and the Bushman children sometimes danced in the shallows, their feet making flashing, rhythmic splashes, or bathed themselves until their skins were shining gold.

One night I went to the werf with a lantern and suddenly found myself beset by insects flying all around me, attracted by the light. It was the mating flight of white ants, which had come out of the ground in great numbers and now filled the air. The Bushman men were away on a hunting trip, unfortunately, but the women came to the light as quickly as the ants and began at once to catch them and stuff them into their mouths, saying "*gurico gum*" as they did so, *gurico* being the name of the ants and *gum* the word used for candy, for sweet gum that oozes from the trees, and for sweet caterpillars. Much faster than the women could eat, more and more ants came flying in a swarm as thick as a blizzard and already the ground was white with wings, for the ants, throwing themselves to the earth, would drop their wings instantly and begin to mate with each other in twos, in threes, even forming in great circles that turned as the ants ran scurrying to keep their positions, each one mounted with its forefeet on the back of the ant before it, pushed on by the ant behind.

Sometimes an ant would fail to shed its wings and, finding that the great trains dragging hampered its mating, would twist and thrash and struggle, squeezing the wings between its thorax and abdomen, which did break off the wings but left the stubs. More and more ants were flying to the light and their circles were growing bigger and bigger until we couldn't move without stepping on them, but the women, getting more excited and moving very quickly, as if responding to the pace and the excitement of the ants, scooped them up and ate them as fast as they landed, spitting out the silver wings as one would spit out chaff. Over our heads a few night birds and many bats were flying, catching and eating the ants before they reached the ground, and around our feet huge pink hunting-spiders rushed in and out of the swarm, dragging the ants from their acts of copulation and carrying them away to eat them in the dark.

Before long the flight had ended. Only a few late-coming ants bumped against the light, the night birds and bats were gone, and the spiders had run away. Nothing was left but the white wings like petals all over the ground and the wings that were caught in people's throats or stuck to their faces. The women, quite composed now, brushed themselves off, and one of them sang a song:

Gurico gum, ah

Ah, ah.

I noticed that each woman had managed to save a little bag or vegetable husk full of ants for her husband. These they put away.

That was in the late spring, a fertile season full of promise, and when it was over the best season of the year began, called the Veld Food Season, which starts some time in March. The big rains have ended, the air is warm but not hot, the veld is filled with water, game, fruit, roots, and green-leaved vegetables, and sometimes many of the people of the large extended bands come together to live, to hold important ceremonies which require many people, and to enjoy each other's company. Sometimes they separate into very small bands because they can now go anywhere they wish,

each family going to the part of the veld where the type of food grows that the family most enjoys. There is water everywhere, in small seasonal waterholes, in shallow salt pans, in hollow trees, and the people thrive and grow quite fat. One of their favourite foods, one that grows in great abundance at this season, is a ground nut called *tsi*, which grows on a trailing vine and is so fat that if you leave a kernel of it on a piece of paper it will leave a greasy stain. *Tsi* is regarded by the Kung Bushmen as a very powerful food, one of the powerful veld foods in which there is a special essence, something mysterious and magic which gives them a life force all their own so that it would be dangerous to eat them during the year if this life force were not first subdued or not first integrated with the life force of the people. These foods are the mainstays of the Bushmen's diet, and are fat; and every year people in their child-bearing years, when they consider themselves subject to harm, protect themselves against these foods by a ritual act.

The act of protection is called *choa*, and it is interesting because it differs from the protective rituals performed by agricultural peoples to save their crops or animals from harm, or to cause their increase. The Bushmen *choa* themselves not to protect their fertility, for decrease in the number of children is not a problem to them, but to make sure that they, the young adults and mainstays of the community, will not get thin and starve.

Those whom Bushmen call "old people," adults who have had three children, are expected to protect themselves and also to protect young people of the same sex. The *choa* ceremonies are performed in the Veld Food Season for each of the powerful veld foods as they ripen. The ceremony itself is simple; in order to *choa tsi*, for example, an old woman simply chews a mouthful of *tsi* with a few bites of a root called *shasha* if *shasha* is available or any one of certain other permissible roots if *shasha* is not, and spits the resulting paste into her palms. If she is *choa*ing herself she washes her hands in the paste; if she is *choa*ing a younger woman she rubs the paste on the young woman's arms and chest. It is an important ceremony, for no young person would think of eat-

ing *tsi* without it, but it is at the same time a casual, household ceremony, done without fuss or audience; oftener than not, it will be performed in the morning before breakfast, say, or when the woman is resting for a moment in the veld, ceasing her digging to drink a sip of water. It is a powerful ceremony, though, for the woman *choa*ed may then eat *tsi* in safety for a whole year, until the next season when it ripens again.

That year, in the Veld Food Season, there was a tragedy and also a wedding. The tragedy took place late one afternoon when a baby girl, playing house with a real fire, burned down her grandfather's grass scherm, thus destroying everything her grandparents owned, everything they had made over a lifetime. The two old people had been very industrious and the wife a prolific maker of ostrich-eggshell beads.

At the start of the blaze a great crowd of people gathered, arriving just in time to see the baby girl run out of the scherm as it collapsed in flames behind her. She ran straight to her mother and sat at her feet, ignoring the great crowd of people and placidly eating one of her grandfather's leather sandals which she had rescued from the fire and which, she found, had been cooked to a turn. No one was angry with the child, everyone was thankful that she had not been hurt. The people remarked at the size and the intensity of the fire and shook their heads at the destruction, each one telling someone else where he had been when he first had seen the blaze. They asked each other why no one put the fire out, as no one did, and soon the scherm was a heap of white ash and the old couple who owned it ruined materially, too old to start again.

A few weeks after that, two children were married. The groom was about sixteen and the bride was eight. It was considered to be an excellent match, as the bride was pretty and the groom was already becoming famous as a hunter. But even in these auspicious circumstances complications and involved negotiations arose, until, for a while, people began to think that no wedding would take place. The bride's aunt disliked the groom's mother, and recalled an old scandal that had shadowed the family for years. The groom's mother had

divorced the groom's father long ago to marry her present husband, which in itself was altogether usual, but it came out that the man and woman had maintained an adulterous relationship before the divorce and furthermore were tabu relatives, which made their union incestuous—not as severely so as marriage between parent and child or brother and sister, but incestuous nevertheless—and it caused a scandal that reverberated throughout all of Nyae Nyae. The two were middle-aged when they married, and they had clung solidly together through the storm of scandal and disapproval, for it was truly a marriage of love.

The little girl did not want to be a bride. When we asked her how she felt about her wedding she hid her face in her hands and said that she was still a young child, too young to get married.

All in all, only the groom's family behaved well, showing patience and forbearance until at last the wedding took place. One day the young man killed a little buck and, according to custom, gave most of it to his bride's parents, thus proving that he hunted well and would provide for them and their daughter. With this the engagement was sealed. Shortly afterward the mothers of the bride and groom built a scherm for the young couple which they furnished with wood and water and enlivened with a fire, kindled by brands from their own fires. Very early the following day the bride's mother adorned the bride, washing her, hanging white bead ornaments from her hair, rubbing her clothing with red, sweet-smelling powder, as symbol to Bushmen of beauty. Then, sitting her upon one large kaross, they covered her with another and left her to spend the day motionless, waiting for evening, when the union would take place.

It is common in Bushman ceremonies for a person at a transitional moment of life to be raised from the ground and hidden from the sun, as though suspended between earth and sky. Young people on the day of their first marriage are protected in this way; so are newborn babies, and so are girls on the day of their first menstruation. At a funeral, too, the body before burial is covered and raised from the ground, and perhaps all this is because a person is especially sus-

ceptible to damage at times of life when change is taking place, when, perhaps, a person is as delicate and fragile as a new moth emerged from a cocoon.

Because the sun brings death, no ceremony or part of any ceremony is performed when the sun is strong; but when evening came and the sun itself was dying, the groom was led to his new home by his three brothers, who took him by the hands and pulled him there, forced him, for custom demanded that he show reluctance. The bride, according to custom, refused to go to her husband and had to be picked up by another little girl and carried to him. In the drama of reluctance the bride struggled while the other girl caught her. She lifted the bride and carried her on her shoulders, not upright as a figure of triumph but wrapped in the kaross and motionless, like a dead little animal, then put her shrouded body on the floor of the new scherm and left her there to lie quietly while the wedding guests arrived. Again according to custom, the groom seemed to take no notice of his new bride; the people in the werf paid no attention, and, in fact, all the people went about their business in such a matter-of-fact way that an observer would think that nothing had happened although the young people were now married, the wedding had taken place.

The parents of the couple could not attend the wedding, for the young bride and groom were so tabu to them at this time that they could not even mention their names. In fact, no older person could attend, and the guests who came were all children, three-year-olds to teen-agers, who sat by the young couple's fire decorously, the boys on the man's side, the girls on the woman's, and talked quietly for twenty minutes or so, the youngest guests leaving when their bed-times came. That was all. In the morning the little girl and her young husband were anointed with fat by their mothers, and they lived together from that day on.

A month later the bride's mother, who was herself a young woman, bore another child, her second daughter. We were at her werf at the time, sitting in the shade. That day the young woman had not gone out for veld food, but was lying propped up on her elbow in front of her scherm when sud-

denly, without telling anyone what was happening, she stood up and walked into the bushes, only to come back some time later with her baby in the fold of her kaross. We might not have known what had happened except that she was smiling a sure, sweet smile because she was pleased with herself. Her belly was flatter, and a tiny foot with a pink sole and curled toes stuck out from her kaross.

Day or night, whether or not the bush is dangerous with lions or with spirits of the dead, Bushman women give birth alone, crouching out in the veld somewhere. A woman will not tell anybody where she is going or ask anybody's help because it is the law of Bushmen never to do so, unless a girl is bearing her first child, in which case her mother may help her, or unless the birth is extremely difficult, in which case a woman may ask the help of her mother or another woman. The young woman was only fifty feet from the werf when she bore her daughter, but no one heard her because it is their law that a woman in labour may clench her teeth, may let her tears come or bite her hands until blood flows, but she may never cry out to show her agony. Bushmen say a woman must never show that she is afraid of pain or childbirth, and that is why a woman goes alone, or why a young girl goes only with her mother, for then if she shows her pain and fear, only her mother will know.

When labour starts, the woman does not say what is happening, but lies down quietly in the werf, her face arranged to show nothing, and waits until the pains are very strong and very close together, though not so strong that she will be unable to walk, and then she goes by herself to the veld, to a place she may have chosen ahead of time and perhaps prepared with a bed of grass. If she has not prepared a place, she gathers what grass she can find and, making a little mound of it, crouches above it so that the baby is born onto something soft. Unless the birth is very arduous and someone else is with the woman, the baby is not helped out or pulled, and when it comes the woman saws its cord off with a stick and wipes it clean with grass. Then the mother collects the stained grass, the placenta, and the bloody sand and covers

them all with stones or branches, marking the spot with a tuft of grass stuck up in a bush so that no man will step on or over the place, for the ground where a child has been born is tainted with a power so strong that any man infected with it would lose an aspect of his masculinity, would lose his power to hunt. The woman does not bury the placenta, for if she did she would lose her ability to bear more children.

The moment of birth is a very important one for the child and for the mother; it is at this moment that the child acquires a power, or an essence, over which he has no control, although he can make use of it. It will last him all his life; it is a supernatural essence that forever after connects the person born with certain forces in the world around him: with weather, with childbearing, with the great game antelope, and with death, and this essence is called the *now*.

There are two kinds of *now*, a rainy or cold one and a hot or dry one. If a person has a wet *now* and burns his hair in a fire or urinates in a fire, the person's *now* is said to make the weather turn cold (if it is the dry season) or bring rain (if it is the rainy season). If a person has a dry *now* and burns hair or urinates in a fire, the *now* is said to stop a cold spell or a bad storm. When a person dies, too, the weather changes violently according to the person's *now*. After a death, scorching droughts or devastating storms are sure to follow.

We knew a Bushman woman at Gautscha whose young son was living not with her but far away with the family of his infant wife, and once, when a rainstorm came so violently that branches were splintered from the trees and water ran in torrents like waterfalls over the rocks beside the pan, the woman began to pine and grieve for her son, who, she felt sure, was dead. At last a visitor came from her son's band who assured her that her son was safe and well, and she knew then that the storm was not for his *now*, loose in the air, but possibly for the *now* of someone else, though when she heard the news it did not matter to her who might have died, for she was happy.

The effect of *now* is simple when a person dies, or when a person burns his hair or urinates to change the weather. With

childbearing for women and with killing the great antelope for men (as the great antelope also have *now*, although the small ones do not) the *now* has a larger, more complex effect. In these cases the *now* of the hunter interacts with the *now* of the antelope, the *now* of the woman interacts with the *now* of the child newly born, and when the blood of the antelope falls upon the ground as the antelope is killed, when the fluid of the womb falls upon the ground at the child's birth, the interaction of *nows* takes place, and this brings a change in the weather. In this way a mother may bring rain or drought when she bears a child, a hunter may bring rain or drought when he kills an antelope, no matter what kind of *now* the mother or the hunter may have. The mother or the hunter can only watch the weather to see what has taken place.

Now is intangible, mystic, and diffuse, and Bushmen themselves do not fully understand its workings. They do not know how or why *now* changes weather but only that it does. They watch the changes carefully, though, and by observing have discovered the limits of their own *nows*. When the fluid from a mother's womb falls upon the ground the child's *now* is determined, and it is partly for this reason that birth is such a mighty thing.

Birth is usually joyous. Bushmen of all ages adore their children and grandchildren, placing a child's health and wishes uppermost in their minds. Orphans are eagerly adopted by their aunts or grandparents, and a newborn baby is welcomed as though it were the first baby the werf had ever seen. Sometimes, though, a baby is born that cannot be supported, and if this happens the baby is destroyed. If a woman bears a child that is crippled or badly deformed, she is expected to destroy it, and if the season is very hard and she already has a baby under a year old depending on her milk, she is forced to kill her newborn child. Bushman women can hardly bear this, but they do.

If a woman knows that she must kill her baby, she braces herself for this as best she can, and when the time comes to do it she must act immediately, must take advantage of the moment after birth before the infant has "come to life,"

that moment between the time the baby is born and the time her love for the baby wells up in her so that the act would be impossible forever after. She must think of the child she has already and act quickly, before she hears her infant's voice, before the baby moves or waves its feet; she must not look at it for long or hold it, but must have a shallow grave ready for it and must put it in at once and cover it and never think of it again. In times of extreme deprivation she can do this, or she can wait to watch both her children die. All this is very hard, and Bushmen, who have no mechanical form of contraception and know no way to cause miscarriage or abortion, prefer to abstain from intercourse for long periods rather than to suffer such pain.

We knew one woman who had been forced to destroy a baby to save an older child, and we knew one woman who had borne a crippled child and had been persuaded to destroy it by her mother, who had been present at the birth. Such things are very rare, though, and this is fortunate.

When the young woman came back to the werf with her baby she sat down and calmly washed the blood from her legs with water from an ostrich eggshell. Then she lay on her side to rest with her baby beside her, and covered the baby from the sun with a corner of her kaross. She put her nipple in the baby's mouth and let her try to nurse. The young woman still said nothing to anyone, but she did open her kaross to show the baby, and one by one we all came by to look at her, and she was not brown, not gold, but pink as a pink rose, and her head was shaped perfectly. At the bottom of her spine was a Mongolian Spot, dark and triangular, and her hair, which she shed later, was finely curled and soft as eider down.

The father had been away, but he came home a little later and sat stolidly down on the man's side of the fire, his hands on his knees. He pronounced the baby's name softly to himself. Later, when he had no audience, he slipped his finger into the baby's hand. Of course the baby grasped it strongly, and the father smiled.

