

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



A Story Like the Wind

Laurens van der Post

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About the Author

Laurens van der Post was born in South Africa in 1906, the thirteenth of fifteen children in a family of Dutch and French Huguenot origins. Most of his adult life was spent with one foot in Africa and one in England. His professions of writer and farmer were interrupted by ten years of soldiering in the British Army, serving with distinction in the Western Desert, Abyssinia, Burma and the Far East. Taken prisoner by the Japanese, he was held in captivity for three years before returning to active service as a member of Lord Mountbatten's staff in Indonesia and, later, as Military Attaché to the British Minister in Java.

After 1949 he undertook several official missions exploring little-known parts of Africa, and his journey in search of the Bushmen in 1957 formed the basis of his famous documentary film and book *The Lost World of the Kalahari*. Other television films include *All Africa Within Us* and *The Story of Carl Gustav Jung*, whom he met after the war and grew to know as a personal friend. In 1934 he wrote *In a Province*, the first book by a South African to expose the horrors of racism. Other books include *Venture to the Interior* (1952), *The Heart of the Hunter* (1961), and *A Walk with a White Bushman* (1986). *The Seed and the Sower* was made into a film under the title *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, and, more recently, *A Story Like the Wind* and *A Far-Off Place* were combined and made into the film *A Far-Off Place*.

Sir Laurens van der Post was awarded the CBE in 1947 and received his knighthood in 1981. He died in 1996.

Also by Laurens van der Post

IN A PROVINCE
VENTURE TO THE INTERIOR
THE FACE BESIDE THE FIRE
A BAR OF SHADOW
FLAMINGO FEATHER
THE DARK EYE IN AFRICA
THE LOST WORLD OF THE KALAHARI
THE HEART OF THE HUNTER
THE SEED AND THE SOWER
JOURNEY INTO RUSSIA
THE HUNTER AND THE WHALE
THE NIGHT OF THE NEW MOON
A FAR-OFF PLACE
A MANTIS CAROL
JUNG AND THE STORY OF OUR TIME
FIRST CATCH YOUR ELAND
YET BEING SOMEONE OTHER

With photographs by Burt Glinn

A PORTRAIT OF JAPAN
A PORTRAIT OF ALL THE RUSSIAS

For
Emma-Clare Crichton-Miller
and Rupert van der Post; David
James Laurens Crichton-Miller and
Rebecca van der Post, in order to
redeem a promise made to them far
too long ago.



As well as to my wife, Ingaret Giffard
for keeping me up to it.

A Story Like the Wind

Laurens van der Post

'The story,' the Bushman prisoner said, 'is like the wind. It comes from a far-off place and we feel it.'

Chatto & Windus

LONDON

TESTAMENT

Ákeŋ ʒēnnā, tī ē, ñ !kā sshō āu !ʒōē-sshō-!kui,
ssē !ʒōōñniyā, kkē, ñ ssē !kúitēŋ ñ-kā !ʒōē, ñ ssē
ttum̄m̄-ā !kē-tā-kū kã kkō-kkōm̄m̄

Tā, ñ lkū llnā;

ñ ʒāuki !kī kkō-kkōm̄m̄

Ñ, lkū-g lnē ī, () ttum̄m̄ ḡḡuē k̄kum̄m̄, hã ñ kã
ttū hã; āu kã lnē !kā !kā sshō, ā; hã ssē-g lnē

áu kã táttī ē, ñ lkē
ssīn !ḡwētēŋ !uhí hhóá !ʒarrā; hīn !ḡwētēŋ !kām
llā ñ-kā !ʒōē; ñ ssē llā ssuēñ hī; ñ ssīn
ttum̄m̄ttum̄m̄ kī !yā llē; āu ñ !noá !kū, ē ñ ssīn
lla ī; āu kã táttī ē k̄kum̄m̄ llkuán ē !khwē.

“Thou knowest that I sit waiting for the moon to turn back, that I may listen to all the people’s stories . . . For I am here—in a great city—I do not obtain stories— . . . I do merely listen, watching for a story which I want to hear; that it may float into my ear . . . I will go to sit at my home that I may listen, turn my ears backwards to the heels of my feet on which I wait, so that I can feel that a story is in the wind.”

Introduction

I BEGIN WITH the extract from a statement made by a Bushman convict a hundred years ago, which appears as my Testament on the previous page because it shows that he was sick even more for stories than for home or people. One of a doomed fragment of the first people of Africa, he had been sentenced to work on the breakwater in Table Bay which, at that time in the Cape of Good Hope, was considered the heaviest punishment for crime, short of death. He had been sentenced thus because when hungry he had taken a sheep from the flock of a man of a race who had stolen all his own people's great land.

The statement from which this extract is taken is for me one of the most tragic and significant utterances to come out of my native country, but I have given only this much because it is enough to show, as nothing else I have encountered in the literature of the world, how the living spirit needs the story for its survival and renewal. It was this universal consideration which made me take up the story that follows. But I had another reason, as urgent to me personally, for writing it.

Men have written a great deal about the history of Africa: the horror of the past, the racial, social and economic problems; the dirt, the dust, the heat, the fever, the mosquitoes and many other painful and enigmatic aspects of the land. But no one, as far as I know, has ever recorded the aspect of Africa with which this story is concerned. It is an aspect which cannot be rendered by any purely rational means or any merely documentary or factual processes. However imaginatively written, it cannot even be rendered

just as history. It can only be done in the way in which Africa itself excelled and transmitted it from unrecorded time to the present day through stories, myths and legends. They alone can reflect what I can only describe as the magic which life in primitive Africa seems to me to have possessed before we arrived from Europe to spoil it.

I was lucky enough to be born just in time to experience some of this ancient Merlinesque world of Africa. I was so close to it as a boy that all I had to do was sit and listen for the heroic dead and their magical age to live again on lips of living men who had experienced and even made it. As a result, all the fairy-tale characters of my childhood were not the pale faces of the breed to which I and my family belonged but the yellow, copper-coloured and black indigenous peoples of the land. They were so for all members of my family. I was one of fifteen children. When the few of us who are left alive of what was once a large pioneering family meet and recall our relationships with the despised coloured peoples of our childhood, I am struck how warm our voices become, how lively the conversation and quick the imagination.

For example, we had a man, half Bushman, half Hottentot, who worked for us and first came to us as a boy, already dismissively named 'Vet-Kop' (Fat-head), since his first employers, when they took him away, did not think it necessary to ask him what his parents called him. The amputation from his own society was so brutal that he himself lost all memory of his original name.

He was always in and out of our local gaol for minor offences against a one-sided code of law and always came straight back to us. There would have been a mutiny in the army of children in my home had my parents turned him away. Fortunately, they loved him as we did and he had an influence on my imagination that no minister of the Dutch Reformed Church could equal. To this day I grieve that he is

not alive in this grey moment of time to colour it for me as he coloured my childhood with his rainbow spirit.

The truth is that children like ourselves were lucky enough to be in touch with this past through such people as Fat-head, before the slanted Calvinist spirit of our society could convert us into sour creatures of disapproval and acid judgement. We were therefore wide open to the wonder of Africa. As a result, this flow of a primitive world into my imagination was so rich that even I have been surprised by its wealth. I constantly turn to it again and again as a person might on a cold winter's night to a fire for warmth. The older I have become, the greater has grown my awareness of the debt I owe to this fast vanishing world of Africa and the greater my conviction that somehow it must be recorded, so that it should always be there to help thaw the frozen imagination of our civilised systems so that some sort of spring can come again to the minds of men.

The recording seems all the more urgent because the ancient way of keeping alive this aspect of life has itself been lost in African societies and it is no longer passed on from generation to generation in the shape of stories. Africa, when I was a child, had at its disposal for this purpose an immense wealth of unwritten literature. But we, just through the radioactive fall-out of the nuclear split in the European spirit, have killed contemporary Africa's respect for its own great spoken literature of the past. Modern African societies, I regret to say, have so lost their own natural way that they even tend to distrust anyone who tries to redirect them, as I have tried to do, to what is valuable in their own beginnings. To tell them that the balance has never been fairly struck between the primitive and the civilised in any society as yet is believed, by many in Africa, to be just a form of intellectual paternalism, if not a trick, to keep them in a 'backward state of mind' for selfish European ends. One of the most reprehensible things we have done to the people of Africa is to make them ashamed of the working of their

natural imagination. We have made them like children who are ashamed of their own mothers; ashamed of the natural spirit that gave birth to their unique character and once made them so vivid.

Part of the complex of personal reasons that made me try to preserve in the form of a story something of what was wonderful and honourable about primitive life in Africa, is the hope that it may help to restore the self-respect to African imagination, of which it should never have been deprived. Another is the belief that this story may, even at this late hour, awaken some awareness of how much the despised primitive values deserve to be honoured by the most civilised of men, not only for their own sakes, but so as to help them on the way to honouring African man in their societies as they wish to be honoured themselves.

Finally as a story, its setting is not photographic. It is a painting of only part of an immense landscape, and even in part is not complete because, like all paintings, it chooses for its canvas only what the painter finds significant in the scene. For example, the Matabele people in this story are not representative and are described only in so far as they carry a particularly electric charge of what is representative in African man. They were chosen as conductors, because a Matabele clan, almost untouched by our own time, still inhabited the 'far-off place' which is the raw material of this story, when I rediscovered it some years ago. I found them still telling their stories in the ancient way. Theirs was one of the voices I had in my ear as I wrote, compelling my story to be a thing not so much of pen and pre-determined pattern, as of the spoken word I once had direct from their burning imagination.

CHAPTER ONE

Hintza's Warning

SOMETHING HAPPENED TO François when he was barely thirteen, without which the story that follows would not have been possible. He was fast asleep in his bed in his own room at the far western end of the farmhouse at the time, when a tense, high-pitched whimper from Hintza sounding right in his ear woke him.

Hintza was François's own special dog and one of the most important characters in his life. It had been given to François by his father when he was eleven years, six months and seven days old. Life at Hunter's Drift was always so packed with interest for François that he did not measure it just in years, or even half-years, as the time-weary grown-ups of his world did, but in days, if not hours. For instance he would never have a birthday or experience a Christmas without wondering how he could possibly endure the strain of having to wait twelve months before it came round again. He always remembered the shock that went through his system when he heard grown-ups exclaim, as they seemed to him more and more inclined to do, that it was fantastic how quickly Christmas came round again. It struck him so grossly inaccurate, if not incomprehensible, an observation that he secretly regarded it as a downright lie.

Hintza was a magnificent young ridge-back. It was the finest puppy in a litter of six born to a couple of the most famous hunting dogs in southern Africa; a bitch called Nandi

and a dog called Dingiswayo—'Swayo for short to his friends. Both mother and father had received their names from the man who owned them—the chief ranger of one of the greatest game reserves in Africa. This reserve lay to the west, some fifty miles beyond the crescent of hills that enclosed Hunter's Drift to the east as a half moon does a star between the tips of horns. It declined into two sharp points of sheer cliff that cut into the banks of the river near which the homestead of the farm stood. This ranger, before he took up the work of preserving the vanishing game of Africa, had been one of the greatest hunters Africa has ever known. He was the son of the legendary hunter which John Buchan made, thinly disguised, into the hero of two of the stories which François found by far the most exciting of all the many books he wrote. He was known all over Africa as Mopani Théron, although he had Christian names of his own which he kept to himself—but more of that later. He appeared in François's life as Mopani Théron and was just called Mopani by everyone who was his equal, or a polite "Oom" (Uncle Mopani) by young persons like François.

Mopani Théron was seldom seen without one or both of his dogs on the patrols he was constantly carrying out against the poachers of ivory, rhinoceros horn, leopard and other valuable game skins. The poachers, from hideouts skilfully concealed in the dense bush that covered most of that remote country, were for ever raiding Mopani's reserve, which was almost the size of the France from which his ancestors had come. One of François's earliest and most vivid memories was his first glimpse of Mopani riding up to the stoep of Hunter's Drift in the heat of a summer's day, his long legs dangling loose in the relaxed, natural stirrup that all long-distance riders used in Africa, and the lively little Basuto pony on which he was mounted, looking much too small for its tall rider. The right image for describing the effect he made on François at that precise moment did not come until some years later when he saw, in his father's

illustrated edition of Cervantes's great work, a reproduction of a Daumier painting of the elongated Don Quixote. Mopani Théron, François was to realise then, with his long, wiry frame, ascetic features and neat pointed beard, had looked like another Knight of La Mancha come to tilt against evil in the bush of Africa. The parallel was most marked that same evening long ago when he had galloped away to ambush some poachers, who moved mostly at night, his tall sunset shadow, dark as ink, travelling in the scarlet dust at his side. Only unlike the Spanish Knight, he had two superb alert and highly dynamic dogs trotting at the heels of his horse as easily as any of the wild dogs who never know what walking is. They were, of course, Nandi and 'Swayo.

When he noticed how interested the boy was in the dogs Mopani Théron had told François that he had called the bitch Nandi after the mother of the greatest warrior Africa has ever produced—Chaka, the king of the Zulus, whose general 'Mzilikatze had founded the Matabele nation on the perimeter of whose lands both Hunter's Drift and the game reserve lay—because he was certain the bitch would be the mother of great fighting dogs. He called the dog after Dingiswayo, the founder of the Zulu nation and therefore ultimately also of the Matabele, for he was equally sure that 'Swayo would be the begetter of more great dogs.

It must not be imagined from all this, however, that Nandi and 'Swayo were black. Like all ridge-backs they had coats like lions, so much so that when out hunting in the bush that crowded in on Hunter's Drift as it did on the great game park, one had to be always on guard not to let a partial glimpse of their tawny electric colour flickering in the undergrowth trick one into the assumption that they were indeed lions about to attack.

Hintza, one of the couple's fourth litter, was a superb blend of his father's and mother's best qualities. When François first saw him as a puppy, he glowed like one of the nuggets of virgin gold occasionally found in the dried-up

banks and beds of the rivers, which cut deep through hill and bush to join the powerful Zambezi far to the north.

It had been a cold winter's evening when François's father brought Hintza home. The sun, red in a turquoise sky, was just going down over the immense desert which started abruptly some fifty miles beyond on the edge of the bush to the west of the farm. At one minute a person was apparently deep in bush country, the next stepping out of it on to a desert stretching for close on a thousand miles to where it ended in a swell of dunes of piled-up sand, so fine that the lightest wind raised a spume of dust like smoke from their curling summits, moaning faintly in the process, until the sound was lost in the reverberation of the great breakers of the cold South Atlantic, levelling out a satin-yellow beach at their feet.

François and his mother had begun to give up hope of his father's return that night. They were not unduly worried because no one could tell precisely how long any journey from the capital, some four hundred and twenty miles to the east, would take. It was merely that they were both disappointed because, with luck, François's father could have been home two days before. Indeed, for two afternoons François had repeatedly climbed the highest point in the hills at the back of the homestead to look out for any sign of dust on the track of crimson earth that wound in and out of the bush. This third evening had been no exception. When there was only half-an-hour left before the sun would plunge swiftly below an horizon, dark blue and from the hilltop a circle perfect as a ripple, travelling rhythmically out over the surface of a deep, still pool, and there was yet no spurt of dust on the track, François climbed down the hill and started home despondently. He was more disappointed than he would care to admit, because he had woken that morning with a hunch that his father would definitely come home that day. But no sooner had he found the footpath at the bottom of the hill when he was startled

by an outbreak of barking from the five large mongrel watch-dogs they kept on the farm.

He knew at once that something unusual was happening and went up the narrow path to his home at the double, carrying his .22 rifle like a light-infantryman at the trail. He arrived at the edge of the vast clearing on which the homestead stood near the banks of the river, to see his father already dismounted from his horse, the bridle over the crook of his right arm and his left round his wife who had rushed out to greet him.

His father, he learned, when his own excited greeting was over, had come home not on the normal road from the railway, a distance of some ten miles, but on a back trail through the bush leading past Mopani Théron's base camp, fifty miles further away.

And what had he been doing at Mopani's camp? He asked the question of François with a mysterious air and the note of teasing which he always seemed to use towards his only son when he needed a counter for the uprush of feeling that came to him when his affections were deeply engaged. François remembered this aspect of their meeting particularly, because it seemed to him at the time that never had he known this paradoxical trait in his father's character as lively and pronounced. So much so that it made him oddly uneasy, almost as if it had another purpose, that red sunset evening, than its normal one of preserving the proportions of male restraint and deep-felt emotion at any given moment in his father's Spartan state of being. Anxious as he was to know what lay behind it all, he was to remember that he instinctively connected his reaction with the fact that he had never seen his father looking so tired after a journey, nor suddenly so thin and so much older.

However, all trace of unease vanished when his father explained why he had come the long, round-about way just to spend a night with Mopani Théron. He said that all the

while he had been away he had been thinking that although François had a gun of his own (he had on his tenth birthday been presented with a new .22 repeating rifle and two hundred rounds of ammunition), he still needed something more before his equipment as a hunter was complete. Could François guess what that was?

François had a very good idea, not of what it was but of what he would like it to be. Yet so much beyond all reasonable expectation was it that he quickly pushed all thought of it aside, because, young as he was, he already knew what agonies of disappointment over-expectation could produce in people and, as a result, had determined that the beginning of wisdom in any young person in the power of unpredictable grown-ups, was to take every possible precaution against excess of hope and anticipation.

Couldn't he guess? His father went on in that new, rather tired voice which he seemed to have developed on the journey just behind him. What was it that François secretly wanted and yet was so small that it could be concealed on his person? Yes, let François look at him. He had something on him for François at that very moment.

The emphasis convinced François that it could not be what he longed for, and made him glad in a sad way that he had not indulged his expectation. He could not imagine how what he would have liked as a present could be concealed on his father's person. Examining his father as he stood there, tall in front of François, his arm about his wife, who seemed to be, in the unfair way of grown-ups, already in the conspiracy, and the brilliant dying light of the winter's day like a halo round them, François could detect no bulge in his clothes, nor any other evidence that his father might have brought him anything of importance. He tried not to give any sign of the involuntary inrush of disappointment, but he found himself silently imploring Providence with a quick, strong wish: "Dear Lord, please not another hunting knife."

Both parents seemed to have realised that teasing had gone far enough because, at a nudge from François's mother, his father lifted the flap of the wide, deep pocket of his old military great-coat, put his right hand inside and when he pulled it out again joined it with his left. With both hands cupped together he held out to François something of a deep golden colour.

Although it took him some time to believe it, so great was his surprise, it was of course exactly what he had secretly wanted; perhaps somewhat smaller than he would have liked but none the less a puppy and a dog of his own. It could not have been more than a fortnight old and was fast asleep, no doubt exhausted by its journey and from the shock of suddenly being alone. Its eyes, fringed with unusually long lashes for any dog, however well-bred, were tightly shut and creased at the corners, like the lines round eyes that have looked far too intently and far too long at the African sun.

As François's eyes came out of their trance of unbelief, they saw the cold evening air send a shiver through the glistening coat of the tiny yellow bundle in his father's hands. He reached out and took it carefully into his own. He felt with a great flush of pleasure that it was as warm as his breakfast toast. As he thought this, the puppy suddenly opened its eyes and looked up into his own. He was startled to find that they were a deep dark blue. He had never seen so charged and human a colour in any animal's eyes, particularly an animal so small, tired and bewildered as the little puppy between his hands. Looking into them, his sense of wonder grew because all bewilderment was vanishing from the puppy's eyes. They seemed to be recognising in François their destined home. A quick whimper of greeting broke from the puppy; it began to wriggle in his hands and the little yellow tail started to vibrate against the palm which held it, in an effort to wag. At the same time it tried to heave itself nearer to François, so that he had to clasp it

against his chest or it might have fallen. François put his face down to make a noise of welcome to the puppy and at once the cold, wet black nose, the incontrovertible sign of good health in any dog, came up to meet him and a tongue, pink and smooth as the petal of one of the finest of his mother's bright cannas, which grew in the flower garden in front of the house, glistened in the evening light and reached out to lick François's cheek.

"What's his name?" François asked his father, his voice almost incoherent with pleasure, gratitude and surprise, all churned up together.

"He has no name yet," his father replied in that studied, meticulous way of speaking that years of work as an educationalist had inflicted on him. "As he is yours, you must name him and I am certain you will name him well and accurately. But before deciding just remember what distinguished stock he comes from and that he has a mother called Nandi and a father named Dingiswayo—great names both, as you no doubt know."

François's father had been born in the far south of Africa among the great Amaxosa people and spoke their language as he did English and Afrikaans. François had been brought up knowing Amaxosa fairy-tales, myths, legends and history perhaps better than those of the remote Europe from which his people had come some three hundred years before; and almost, though not quite as well, as those of the Bushman people to which his old nurse, Koba, who had died a few months before, had belonged.

Everything his father had told him about the Amaxosa had made them, second only to old Koba's Bushmen, a favourite people. He had been particularly impressed in their history, as his father taught it to him, by one of the Amaxosa paramount chiefs, a dashing, spirit person called Hintza, who had figured in the long War of the Axe, and as his father spoke, François knew suddenly what he would call the puppy. Without doubt or hesitation now, in a clear voice

which surprised even himself with its firmness, he announced as if it were a self-evident fact, "His name please is Hintza."

At the sound of the name Hintza the puppy against his chest became surprisingly alert, for a reason that was to become clearer much later. It wriggled all over and pressed closer against François, and a small noise of contentment broke from it like a sign of confirmation that it had known well in advance what its name was. Then it once more relaxed, shut its eyes, sighed profoundly and resumed its sleep.

"Now I wonder," François's father was teasing him again, "did he put the idea into your head? Or did you really think of it yourself?"

But François felt there were more important things to do then than to engage in a bout of teasing with his father. There was the question of arranging proper accommodation for Hintza in his own room, as well as the problem of seeing that it had food and drink after so long a journey, both matters the urgency of which grown-ups, with their slack attitude to time, were inclined to overlook when dealing with the immediacy of the young. Without answering he turned about and once more at the double, dashed to the house, straight up the wide steps of the broad stoep and vanished inside, hastening for his own room. There he took an old winter coat from the cupboard, arranged it rather like a big bird's nest on the foot of his bed and placed Hintza gently in the middle before covering him over with the end of one of his own woollen blankets. Clearly all this was very much to Hintza's liking because not once did he flicker so much as an eyelid and appeared to be sinking deeper than ever into his sleep.

That done, François hurried out to the big kitchen at the back of the house, snatched a small milking can from a shelf and ran out to the milking sheds a quarter of a mile away at the end of the great vegetable garden and orchard, which

stood on the fertile black soil between his home and the hills. The Matabele herdsmen there were just finishing off the evening's milking and already there were a dozen large gleaming metal pails filled to the brim with milk, standing on the stone floors against the wall near the entrance. As always there was something magical about the milk for François because not only did it glow white as snow in the twilight air, but was topped with a mound of foam caused by the vigour with which the skilful Matabele drew it in quick jets from the cows, making a sound like rain in the shed. This foam, glowing gardenia-white in the brown air, rose high over the silver rims like a Muslim dome.

Snatching the burning copper dipper which hung from a rail above the pail in the company of other dairy utensils, he began filling the little milking-can with such haste that he spilt some of the milk. He was solemnly reproved for it by the chief herdsman, a tall, broad, grey-haired old Matabele gentleman (old that is by François's standards), of whom François was very fond. His name was 'Bamuthi, which meant 'He of the Tree.' He was said to have been born unexpectedly under a sacred tree while his mother was hiding from their hereditary Mashona enemies. The latter had attacked their kraal while the men were away on a hunting expedition. He had been at Hunter's Drift ever since François could remember.

"*Gashle!* Slowly, Little Feather," he said in his deep bass voice. "*Gashle!* He who wastes food will bring famine upon himself. And what has happened that you should want to spoil your appetite when the evening food is nearly cooked?"

'Little Feather' was the Matabele nickname for François. Like so many of the African peoples, European names had no meaning for them and they insisted on giving all white people with whom they came into contact, special African names that symbolised for them their main characteristics. So widespread was this practice that Europeans were only

remembered and referred to among the Africans by these special names and, from the beginning, their name for François had been Little Feather.

They had called him this simply because they called his father (although never to his face and they thought it was a deep secret), The Great Bird. François, who was in the secret from the start because his old nurse had told him of it, knew that this was a name full of instinctive respect. Birds, for the people of this great bush country, had many magical properties. For example, they were thought to know the secret of all living things, to have great foresight and to fill with wisdom the hearts of those who took the trouble to learn their language and listen. That was why African chiefs in the old days had always worn a long black and white tail feather of the *um-Xwangbe* (sacred ibis) stuck in the metal bands around their heads, as a sign for all their people to see that their heads were full of natural wisdom and inspired thought.

Now François's father had been the chief inspector of African education in that vast territory before he so unexpectedly turned to farming. His reputation as a man of great wisdom and learning had spread so widely through the territory that it was even known on the remote frontier where he had carved Hunter's Drift out of the virgin bush. From the moment he appeared among them, both the reputation and manner of his coming seemed to make it inevitable that only the image of a great rare new bird, suddenly alighting from the sky, could serve the impression he made on the indigenous peoples. In this, for once, they had the full approval of old Koba. She resented and hated the Matabele, like all other black African races, for having played so terrible a part in hunting down and destroying without pity the last remnants of her race, which once had been the masters of the whole of southern Africa, if not the entire continent.

Birds, as François knew from the many wonderful stories Koba told him at night before he went to sleep, had even greater magic for the Bushman than for Matabele, the Barotse and the Shangaans. So he had not been surprised when Koba, pledging him to secrecy, told him his father's Sindabele name and confessed that she thought that the Matabele, in naming him thus had, for once, not done too badly.

It seemed logical, if not utterly natural, therefore, that when François was born, he should have been thought of as a feather of the bird that his father was. He had happily accepted this name for years from the Matabele, particularly because invariably they spoke it in a tone of rare protective affection, as if thereby claiming him as one of their own. Moreover, as Matabele children were supposed to be terrified of feathers, he thought that the name implied a certain courage in his own character.

Yet recently, the 'Little' in front of 'Feather' had begun to irk, as though something in François was beginning to feel that it was high time the 'Little' was dropped and he was promoted at least to a full feather, if not another bird in his own right. On this particular occasion the Little smarted more than ever, perhaps because the fact that he had just become the owner of a puppy of his own—and a puppy that would soon be a hunting dog—might have started in him a feeling of crossing a frontier, leaving his childhood for ever behind, and taking the first step towards a new world of full male responsibility.

He was, therefore, uncharacteristically sharp with 'Bamuthi. Indeed, so sharp was he in his reply that if his father had heard, François would most certainly have been severely reprimanded. François's father always insisted on his household showing the utmost courteousness to people who themselves were naturally courteous, and attached much importance to good manners, as did the Matabele.

“Those who judge before they know the facts will learn to string the beads.” He hurled the Sindabele proverb back at 'Bamuthi with the automatic pompousness proverbs tend to bring to the tongue of those who use them, even one so young as François. The reference to ‘stringing the beads’ was a Sindabele image for the tears, bright as beads, that human beings shed in moments of great grief.

Pressed and preoccupied as François was, he had snapped it out unthinkingly. But he did have a sneaking sense of shame realising that, perhaps for the first time, he had not preceded his sententious remark with the ‘Old Father’ that good manners demanded from a youngster like himself when addressing so old and fine a Matabele gentleman.

He felt it all the more when 'Bamuthi replied lightly, without a trace of resentment: “And even the greatest bird, Little Feather, must come down from the sky to find a tree to roost upon.”

This was another proverb implicit with the simple reproof that François could not fail to feel, since it meant that no human being, however old or great, could live high and mighty with his head for ever in the air.

But by this time his little can was full, and snapping the lid firmly into position, he doubled back without another word to his room and Hintza. Hintza was still fast asleep, but François only had to put the bowl of milk, still warm from the cow, near its face to see the shining little nose come alive and the smell of milk make it quiver in scores of the finest magnetic little creases.

A second later the large blue eyes were wide open. Hintza was struggling out of the blanket and on to its feet, so unsteady and trembling that François had to support it under its stomach with his hand, while it fell to lapping up the milk as if it had not fed for days. “Gosh,” he remarked to himself, “his stomach is as warm as one of Lammie’s hot-water bottles.”

From that moment on Hintza spent every night of its life in François's room. This was not an unusual arrangement. One of the facts to be faced in a dog's life in the wild country where François lived, was that an enormous number of dogs all the year round were killed by leopards. Leopards, who were great gourmets, loved two kinds of food above all others: dogs and baboons. Already in François's own life, seven of his father's favourite ridge-backs had been killed by leopards.

The trouble was that no self-respecting dog could ever see any reason why it should be afraid of a leopard. A leopard was hardly any bigger than itself and, in any case, was a species of cat which no dog could be expected to respect. When they had found themselves faced with a leopard, the dogs had had no hesitation in rushing to the attack. Unfortunately, leopards not only had teeth that were sharper than dogs and jaws that were just as powerful, but they were also armed with four sets of long, sharp claws, as tough and piercing as steel. Dogs could not hope to match such heavy armament. No one in François's world had ever heard of an encounter between leopard and dog where the dog had won the battle.

So it had become the custom in François's home to keep their ridge-backs inside at night. The duty of guarding the homestead was left to five large mongrels because, although François now would hardly admit it to himself, the mongrels of Africa were far more intelligent and capable of taking care of themselves than well-bred dogs like Hintza. Hintza and his breed were too proud to put intelligence first. They needed men, as men needed them, to be at their best in the bush. When faced with any challenge from wild animals, even leopards, they felt it a point of honour to take up the issue without hesitation. It had accordingly become a fundamental principle in the training of all pure-breed dogs at Hunter's Drift, to make them so obedient to their

master's instructions that they would never attack any game, let alone leopard or lion, unless ordered to do so.

Somehow the mongrels were different. Born to make their way in life without any automatic privileges, they developed their sense and intelligence to an extraordinarily high degree. Moreover they were never troubled by any consideration of honour, self-respect or what some call the bourgeois compulsions of 'keeping up appearances.' They could, when confronted by wild animals, fight as fiercely and perhaps even more intelligently, than any ridge-back. But they fought only as a last resort and, at the first hint of any danger, much preferred to give tongue and bark and, at times, or so it seemed to François, at night even to scream their alarm. So it was quite natural, and with his parents' full approval that Hintza, from the start, shared François's room.

For some eighteen months Hintza was trained to be a hunter's dog with all the dedication and natural patience born of affection that François, single-minded as only a lonely boy can be, could bring to the task. In these crucial matters he also had his father's great experience, willingly shared. But perhaps most important of all, twice a year in the spring and early autumn, François was allowed to go on holiday to Mopani Théron's camp. On these occasions Hintza, of course, went with him. There they were constantly taken out on routine patrols in the bush by Mopani, so that both François and the rapidly developing Hintza had the finest teacher in these matters that Africa could produce. Also, Hintza had the constant example of his own parents, Nandi and 'Swayo.

Unexpected as it was to François, it was not really surprising, therefore, that at the end of his third holiday in the bush with Mopani Théron, sitting by their last camp fire the night before he had to go back to Hunter's Drift, that the old hunter admitted to François with a certain whimsical reluctance: "Little cousin" (that is how he invariably addressed François in the intimate manner that people of

his generation reserved for the young) “Little cousin, it was a bad day for me and a good day for you, when I allowed that ‘slim’ clever father of yours to talk me into giving Hintza to him. I am afraid he is going to be even better than his parents. It just shows you how much breeding counts in life.”

Pleased as François was with Mopani’s verdict, and much as he admired Nandi and ‘Swayo, François secretly felt that there was more to it than mere breeding. A great deal, he believed, was due to the fact that Hintza had been trained largely by a young person. He was convinced that no grown-up could have done the job half as well. He had only to think how incomprehensible grown-up people could be and how often they failed him in matters that seemed of the utmost importance, to be sure that the same gulf would exist between people like his father and Mopani, however well-meaning, and the little puppy.

He remembered, as an example, that first morning when he had taken it, after its long night’s sleep, into the breakfast room to show it to his parents. Ever since it had woken up the puppy had been just one, long intensive wriggle of playful energy. But at the first glimpse of François’s parents it had gone instantly still and rigid, staring at them in sheer unbelief. Then it had suddenly given a sharp, apprehensive yelp, whirled about, and made straight for reassurance to François, who was kneeling on the rug near the wide open fireplace. The moment its eyes found François the bewilderment vanished.

Although he had only known Hintza for one night, François felt sure that Hintza’s behaviour was due to the fact that his parents somehow were just too big for him to take into his understanding; their eyes too big and bright with predetermined grown-up judgement. The puppy, indeed, was having the same sort of difficulties he himself had experienced when first confronted with the concept of giants and colossi in fairy-tales and legends. Only he,

François, was of a size that Hintza's young senses could grasp.

The parallel made him realise that he must act as a bridge between Hintza's uninitiated capacity for understanding and this world of tall, confident grown-ups, with loud voices and heavy footsteps, that made the floors vibrate and the ground shake under the purple pads of Hintza's sensitive paws. For months François was to notice how Hintza, when faced with adults, would inevitably turn to look to him first, before venturing another glance at the outsize shapes that bestrode the world of Hunter's Drift.

But there was one other reason for François's success with Hintza. It was, he was convinced, because he hardly ever spoke to Hintza in Afrikaans, Sindabele or English, the three languages most commonly used in his world. He always spoke to him in Bushman. He had learned Bushman from Koba who had, from as early as he could remember, always talked to him in her own language, when they were alone together. Indeed, his first clear memory was not even of old Koba's wrinkled magnolia skin and somewhat Mongolian face, but rather of the peacock light of brilliant Hunter's Drift sunsets playing on a necklace of heavy dark blue and red glass beads that she always wore, and the sound of her voice singing a Bushman lullaby to coax him, against his will, to sleep.

Bushman was a most difficult language to speak because almost every other consonant in it was a click of some kind. François's mother, who knew only a few words which she liked to use from time to time as a token of respect when speaking to Koba, would flush with the effort of pronouncing them. François therefore could easily have been discouraged from going on with it, if it had not been for four things. First of all, he possessed a child's supple tongue. Then there was his great love for Koba. Also there was the attraction, that appeals to all young people who are compelled, out of the need of protecting values which the

grown-up world have forgotten, to lead in a sense a disguised life, of having his own secret language. It was almost as if an important part of himself felt it were on enemy territory, where it was safer to use a code for communicating with those who shared its secrets. Bushman seemed the perfect answer to this need. Finally, there was the overwhelming fact that Koba had assured him that all the animals, birds, reptiles and insects of Africa, and also the plants, understood the onomatopoeic Bushman tongue.

She told him many stories of how in the beginning the people of the early race, as she called the first Bushman, lived in complete harmony with all living things and plants on earth. She explained that it was only when the people of the early race snatched the first fire from underneath the wing of the great ostrich ancestor of all ostriches and started using it for their own selfish ends, that the animals took fright and ran away from human beings. But even though they fled, they never forgot the meaning of the sound in which they had first conversed in harmony with men.

François thought that from his own short experience of life he had already some intimation that old Koba was right. Even from the start Hintza had seemed to bring evidence to support her. One day François was playing with his puppy in the sun on the stoep of Hunter's Drift and the puppy wandered off on his own near the edge of the high stoep.

François, afraid that it might fall over, called out loudly to him in Bushman, "Here, Hintza! Here!"

In his shout he had put the emphasis on the *tza* and to his amazement his puppy, instead of turning around and coming back to him, had leapt forward and vanished over the brink of the stoep. Alarmed, François dashed after the puppy and saw that it had picked itself up out of the dust, fortunately unhurt, but weak at the knees with shock and a strange, inner excitement, while it stared about wildly, the hair of its coat bristling and its mouth open, growling at the

vacant day which was trembling with light and heat, as if expecting to see some kind of enemy ahead.

At once revelation came to François. Koba had long ago explained to him why the two most important words of command for hunting dogs were *tssisk* and *tza*—used by everyone from the Cape of Storms to Broken Hill. *Tssisk* was used when one wanted a hunting dog to go into the bush and flush out whatever one's quarry happened to be; *tza* when one wanted a hunting dog to go as fast as possible after the quarry, once it was flushed. His father, Mopani Théron and even the Matabele unfailingly used no other words for these precise purposes.

Accordingly François realised instantly how the 'tza' in Hintza had been taken instinctively for a word of command by the puppy. He knew that, henceforth, he would have to be most careful to use Hintza's name differently, or serious and even dangerous confusion might arise between them. So from then onwards Hintza became 'Hin' not only to François but, at his request, to everybody else at Hunter's Drift. The Bushman 'Tza' was added only when one really wanted the dog to go after live game.

These two words were so effective, old Koba had told him, because the hunters of the people of the early race got them straight from the stars. The stars, Koba said, were the greatest hunters of all and if François would come with her one night and walk out away from the sounds of the house into the darkness, she would give him an example of what she meant.

So he had gone with her on a very cold, clear and still winter's night and waited until there was not even the sound of a lion, jackal, hyena, bush-buck, owl or night plover to be heard. Then, as they stood beside the thick hedge of massive fig-trees which lined the orchard and looked up deep into a sky bursting at its black seams with the weight of the stars, François had become aware of a far sound