

*Extract from a story*¹

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AS WAPISHANA made her way along the elder tree of animal she was aware of a buried arch or horizon now uplifted which had been concealed before within the elder tree of bird and the elder tree of fish. It was an arch upon which, as she moved now, she became aware of sunrise at one end gradually piling up towards noon and apparently subsiding or filtering away as it descended towards the other end. And what was remarkable about this was that she began to perceive, for the first time, the progress of the tribe as a relative agent inclining to one absurd extreme or the other — absolute reification or absolute extinction. In fact that arch corresponded to a line that simulated the flight of a bird through the scissors of space or the life-line of a fish from hand to hand upon which to measure the game of consciousness as one would collate the accumulated wisdom in the dispersal of the tribe through invitations issued by hunter to hunted — palm or summons of youth, crenelated fingers of age spread out across the sky, obverse or reverse decapitations or revolutions in the atmosphere.

Invitations which loomed on that arch as towering decoys of man looking towards sunset into which the game leapt (tall as a smouldering wall into the night): invitations which undermined those towers by looking towards sunrise across the pool of darkness into which the game leapt (inconspicuous as the seed of reality in the flare of a match).

At one end of the arch where the journey commenced along the elder tree of animal Wapishana perceived the constellation of cloud known to the tribe as the golden age of laughter. It possessed many towers fashioned like claw and beak — wrinkled claw around the eyes of the tribe — wrinkled beak upon the lips

¹ This story will appear in *The Age of the Rainmakers*. In the stories of this volume Mr Harris hopes to achieve 'an original penetration of vestiges of legend associated with some of the ancient tribes of South America'.

of the tribe. There was a curious subsidence in that beak and claw buried in human flesh like gold in a giant's teeth (marsh of space). So that as Wapishana made her way through the golden age of laughter — half-sunken dawn, half-uplifted features — she felt the precariousness of her foothold, oscillations in cavern or mouth, anatomy of the feast.

Further along the arch of the road — as Wapishana advanced and looked back — the head of the sun lay rusting now within its own mounds or mouthfuls of globe like the comedy of gold traced everywhere or the weight of laughter in bog or cosmos. And *flesh* had been engendered as this palimpsest of gold — fertility awakened as the miraculous soil of artifice. Each wrinkle or smile was the bed or track of beak and claw within the flesh of ancestor marsh or newborn swamp. Once again Wapishana was aware of every precarious leaf or foothold of sun in gigantic cities of cloud on the elder tree of animal as guarding against or being guarded by the subsidence of species.

Subsidence of species. Wapishana had the strangest sensation that every step she now took left her footprint in another's flesh so that the hardness of the globe became her self-deception akin to the merchant of soul — the decoy of soul — and the true game of reality (tender as the night) lay down the arch of the road *through* and beyond the purchase of extinction.

She now stood, however, somewhere in the middle of that arch (blocking the spirit of sunset) against the tower of noon, and behind her the golden age of laughter as it issued from the mouth of dawn or the rusting head of the sun seemed a kind of neolithic cloud — neolithic agriculture — comedy of the leaf. A leaf that still blew through the tower of noon like the flight of a bird or the dive of a fish until the path Wapishana took into the subjective precipitation of night seemed to echo to those footprints of beast in the thickness of air and thinness of water.

It was the thickness of air that constituted, in the first place, another's flesh of the beast in which she trod. It was the thinness of water, in the second place, that constituted another's flesh of the beast in which she trod from the beginning of time when man sold man to the elements. The tower of noon was the flesh of air. The tower of noon was the flesh of rain subtly conforming to Wapishana's footsteps in the moist places of earth as it steamed

into dust or cloud equally susceptible again to the spoor of the tribe.

That spoor or footfall — in the subtlety or immateriality of tribal horizons — subsidence of globe — provided her with the first inklings of the decoy of night long before the tower of noon fell. In a sense the allure of night (the lair of the beast) had been measured for her in advance of her stride. And yet measureless it still was like a yielding substitute whose sponges were the graces of the void, the succulent mirror of god.

As she began to descend upon the sponge of air and water the reflection of noon seemed now less consistent with an absolute tower than with the sun's cap turned into a basin akin to the light footfall of space — lake in the sky — succulent mirror — lair of the fish.

And thus, slowly, increments of night were there long before night itself grew: invisible ruses of night in the crumbling dome of heaven: ruses akin to light veils — veil of lake upon fish — veil of chameleon — veil of spendthrift gravity. It was the transparent decoy of night — aerial beast — at the heart of sunrise and sunset Wapishana followed through the towering redress of noon, veils of noon. That night had already fallen under the skin of day was the most contradictory vision of the lair of the beast that turned, as it were, its own primitive decoy of the dual senses into something far in advance of the onset of nature — prior to the onset of nature — a model of original extremity unfleshed by night or day.

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