

"But what does Modimo do? His work is complete. . . ."

The seer held up his hand: "Look about you," he said. "Is the world complete? Life goes, life comes. Creation is happy, creation is sad. That is the work of Modimo. . . ."

"Yes . . . but . . ."

The seer interrupted Tau: "Great famine raged once and men were dying by their thousands. Many offerings had been made, but in vain. When the misery was at its height, there came a troop of maidens carrying grain baskets on their heads. Each basket was full of mabele, of which each grain was ten times as big as a grain of our mabele. The chief gave food to his people, but the while the bags never grew empty. Then the rain came, and men planted the seed of the God. It sprouted, grew and men harvested. But it was again mabele like our own. Thus did Modimo save his creation. But enough of the gods, man is ever with us and with him have we to live. . . . Yet it grows late, to-morrow comes too."

At a sign from the old man a girl stepped forward and led Tau into the kgoro, where the men were sitting. Tau was a visitor and was received very hospitably. Every day he sat opposite the old man and learned from him.

Next day Tau again visited the old seer. He found him in his usual place in the sun, with his head sunk down upon his breast in deep meditation.

"Ntango," Tau said as he sat down.

"Agee, my child," the old man replied.

There was a long silence before the old man began to speak and Tau had time to watch his teacher closely. He gave his pupil the impression of hunting for things which he could not readily find, things that had gone

astray although they were within reach. At last the old man began to speak:

“Let us come home now, home to things we see everyday, men and women. The seer’s conversation was very disjointed. “Those other men,” he said, “those who did not receive the power of thought, where are they? . . . They are gone . . . they have died out. They had no thought, no remembrance, and the new man soon exterminated them. Man, nxe, he is this, and yet he is not this. . . . he is that and yet he is not that. He is an animal, yet no animal. . . . he is a God and yet no God, he is too much an animal to be a God. Now why do I say he is an animal? Let me tell you . . . He eats, he drinks. When he can find neither food nor drink, then he becomes worse than an animal. . . He will eat and kill to eat. . . Mark the children. . . Wouldst thou spend a single day doing before men, as children do?”

Tau wanted to reply, but the seer held up his hand:

“There was a wise king once, a mighty ruler, but a man of great contemplation. He asked a man in the kgoro once: ‘Wouldst thou for one single day do as children do?’ The man replied: “Thobela, it is easy, for it is not man’s work.” Then the king said: “There is a big ox in my kraal, take one from your kraal and place it with it. If thou doest as children do, then shall both oxen be yours. But if thou failest, then shall both oxen be ours.” “The oxen are mine already,” the man answered, “for tomorrow I shall be a child.”

Next morning the little children ran out of the village skipping and jumping over one another. They had no clothes on. The man jumped out after them, but the king said: “Haai, you man, you are not as one of them, for look, you have clothes on, they have not.” The man replied: “Nay, Thobela, that was not

in the contract. I must do as children do, and not be as children are." The king laughed and said: "He is very clever, but now let him do as children do."

The children played games in the sand and threw the dust over themselves. The man did likewise, although he felt ill at ease. Then he rolled about in the dirt with them. Aye, it was very easy, yet his limbs ached from over much bending. Then the children played other games, they vied with one another who could run fastest on all fours. He did it too, and the women of the kraal looked on and said: "Yo, why does he do as children do? Aoa, he is mad." The man heard it and felt very uncomfortable. It was midday now, and the children went into the shade. "Let us make porridge," they said, and so they took soil into their hands and spat on it till it was wet. But the soil would not cake, so one of them said: "Let us go into the kraal and fetch cow dung, and so make the porridge." The king laughed and looked to see whether the man would do it. But the man said: "Thobela, the oxen are thine."

That night in the kgoro the king spoke to his men and said: "I know that no grown up man can do as children do. Modimo made an animal first and that is why children are like animals. Then he gave man the power of thought. That is why grown men are real men. I have looked at the children, when they play. I thought: "It is easy to do as they do, yet it is not easy. Man will be ashamed, for what will others say? The women gave us the answer, for they said: "He is mad." We have shame in us, and do not think: is it right or not? But we say to ourselves: "What will others say?"

The old seer was silent for a long time, then Tau asked him:

"Why did Modimo not make man completely like himself, without all the animal in him?"

“That is a simple question, and the reply is simple. Man would not be man any more, he would be God. It is the animal in man that peoples the world. . . . Man has the power of thought, but greater than that is his power of remembrance. Wisdom lives thereby and is handed down from father to son, from mother to daughter. It multiplies, for each son remembers something that his father did not know. Mark our proverbs, what are they? They are the wisdom of the ages. Thus said our father, and his father, and so backwards. Wisdom grows, but man is ever the same, that is his animal part. But his heart is born empty. To the end of time he will hate and love, he will have his desires; there will be brave men, there will be cowards; wise men will arise, fools will not be wanting. But all these will be men, different in head, but alike in heart. I have seen generations pass, but they were all the same, their heart did not change. Why? God does not change, he is ever the same. Have lightnings and thunders ever changed? No they have not.”

After a silence Tau asked the inevitable question “What happens to man after death? Does he live on?”

The seer brightened up: “Aye, the body dies, but the spirit lives on and gains that power which Modimo promised to man. Why do we worship the spirit of him who has left us? It is all powerful. But the spirit is not like Modimo. A man who has been in the cattle kraal, smells of the cattle kraal. A spirit that has been man, smells of man. It is godlike, but man is still there. The little things of this Earth still find favour in the eyes of the departed ones. We must therefore propitiate them lest they be angered and do us harm. Some men have powers too, which no other man has. They can approach us unseen and wreak all manner of harm upon us. These are the baloi, the wizards, and it is only the naka, doctor, who can

withstand them. There are not very many real baloi now. Long ago... Ahh. I remember the time when I was your age. It was in the country of the Bahlokoa far away to the North East. That was a country for the baloi. They had powers which we have not. They could change themselves into all manner of shapes, into lions, into snakes into all kinds of animals. Thus did they come before the Lords of Bohlokoa, and perform great miracles before them. All men thought they were Badimo. They permitted it and Modimo was angry. One day they were killed by the lightning from above.

Do you see yonder high peak? My eyes grow dim, but your eyes are those of a young man. There live the spirits of the departed. Pass there at night, and you will hear the murmur of many voices whirling about the air like a whirlwind. The peak has smooth sides, and no man has as yet essayed to climb it. The base has many terraces. On these terraces grow flowers, far brighter and of sweeter scent than the flowers in the veld. A man was going to a wedding once. He passed by the foot of the peak, where all men pass. Then he saw the beautiful flowers. "Aoa, ne," he thought, "I must pick one of those, so that I may look beautiful at the dance." He went to the terrace, and as he lifted his foot to tread upon it, a voice spoke in his ear: "Son of men, no man steps here." He jumped back, then he said again: "It is but the taste of the beer I drank before I left home, which speaks within me." Then he gripped his stick and placed his foot upon the first terrace. He cannot tell what happened next. When men found him, his foot and leg were withered. He went to the chief to be cured, but the chief said to him: "It is not Modimo that has punished you, but the Badimo, the spirits of those who have left us."

During one of the lessons the seer spoke on woman

alone: "Why do we call woman 'mosadi'?" he asked. "Let me tell you. Woman came after man. She follows man. Modimo gave her to man to be a servant unto him. She must be a servant. She has not the power of thought, but she has the power of understanding which all men have. She is the guardian of the young, therefore has Modimo given her something which man does not possess. She hears with her ears those things which are near, but she hears with her body those things which are far away. Why? She has not the strength to ward off evil, but she will flee from it. Her children will flee with her. Some men say it is the spirit of the great Modimo which whispers danger in her ear. She is ever listening and has no time to think. She is ever seeking power, but she must not have it. She would kill herself. Mark fire, it is good and helps man in many ways. Let it escape from man's power what does it do then? It burns everything. Wise man let it burn saying to themselves: "By burning it burns itself." That is true. Such is woman. If she burns, man lets her burn, and when her strength is all burnt out, then does man punish her and teach her her duty. Never touch an angry woman, child of my child, for she is a burning fire. Men live together, they are peaceful, because they have power of thought. Women cannot live together, except they all obey one man. They love one another not. Man must keep women apart."

Tau would have liked to have stayed here a long time and learned many things from the old seer, but news came to him that his tribe was at war with one of its neighbours. He hurried home to join his regiment. After the war he was detailed off to wait upon the chief. He became a royal messenger. The chief liked Tau, because he was intelligent and had the happy knack of keeping silent when occasion demanded. Silence was a valuable gift, especially at

the court of the chief, where many things were done, which no one is to hear. Counsels are bred which affect the chief only and a small ring of councillors. Where superstition is the machinery of state, many things are born in the dark, and only come to light when they are weaned. Their betrayal would greatly diminish the chief's authority. Tau knew how to be silent and became a trusted messenger.

TAU AWOONG.

After serving his chief for four years, Tau asked leave to go home. The chief granted this request.

Tau had not been home for long when his mother spoke to him about marriage. Matau longed for grandchildren, for then her status would be higher still. The men had had their evening meal in the lapa. Matau had waited on her husband and son in person. It is true one of the girls brought the food, but she handed it over to Matau so that she could give it to her lord and to her son.

After the meal it was time to discuss family matters. Matau spoke:

"Father of Tau," she said, "we are speaking."

"Our ears are open, mother," her husband replied.

"Aye, is not this son of ours a man now? Aye he is. But he has no wife. Other young men, who were but babes when he could already walk, what have they done? Let me tell you. They have sought wives, and to-day their mothers are grandmothers. Now what am I? Aoa, I am merely Matau."

"Your words are the very truth, mother of our clan," Ramoroa replied.

"Where is your wife?" Matau asked her son.

"How am I to know, mother?" Tau replied.

“Nay, you must know. See you must seek a wife.”

“Where am I to find her?”

“Ah, ah, ahhh . . . Listen to this man. Where am I to find her? Surely he is a man without eyes in his head. Nxse, let me tell you. Now my brother is Kubu. He is your maternal uncle. Has he not many daughters? Aye, he has. But there is one. She is the fairest of the litter. Mallo, she is a human being. Has she not the smallest ears in the tribe? Aye, they are tiny. She is your wife.”

Matau delivered this dictum in a tone that said: “I have spoken, now no contradictions.”

Tau replied: “We have heard, mother.” Then he said “sleep well” and went to his own hut.

From now onwards Tau was a constant visitor at the village of his maternal uncle. He singled out Phuti from all the other maidens of the village. He never saw her alone, for Native girls always have a younger girl as companion. Puberty is guarded by innocence of childhood, and men argue: “A big girl can keep her tongue where maiden matters are concerned. A girl who has been through the initiation school, has learned that certain things are not spoken about. Now we must give them a younger girl so that she may always fear that the child will betray her secrets. Then will she behave herself.” Yet the older maidens know how to train their little keepers to silence “The little sister” receives many presents, and is so flattered by the big girl calling her “mother,” “grandmother” and other such names, that she would not dream of betraying her “big sister” because then she would be acting like a mere girl. When a young man paid court to “big sister,” he was always very good to the little guardian. She was the chaperone and could betray him and so he bought her silence with gifts and flattery.

Phuti had her little chaperone. The little girl was her half-sister, and she was shrewd. Phuti loved her because she never betrayed her when the big sister met young men on the quiet. The little girl even kept guard and gave the warning if anybody was approaching.

Tau recognised "little sister" as a valuable ally. His mother had given him good advice. He called her "mother", "aunt", "big sister," and sometimes he was carried away by his "kindness of heart," that the little girl grew quite embarrassed, and hid her face in her blanket. While she was doing this, Tau courted Phuti. She knew exactly what Tau wanted, what maiden does not? Phuti pretended to be very shy. When she spoke to Tau, she pulled up her blanket over the left part of her face until only her right eye was visible. She always spoke in a very low voice, so that her words were barely audible.

Tau's wooing was a process of flattery, gross and far from delicate. In reality Phuti was pleased, but she must not show this, she must disbelieve him, and laughingly she replied: "Go on, you are only talking," or "Go away, you are talking nonsense." Tau was not deceived.

One day he said to her:

"Sister, when I look at you, then my heart beats at the back of my head. When are we going to be married?"

She laughed, but Tau was serious. "No", he said, "see I have built a house, I have built a hearth. You must light the fire on the hearth for I shiver at night."

"I shall light it," she replied, serious now.

Next day Tau spoke to his younger brother Phoko:

"Younger brother," he said, "you must be my emissary to-morrow. Go into the village of my uncle

Kubu and say: "Tau, my brother, has built a house. He has built a hearth. Now he is shivering at night. Who is to light the fire? Aoa, it must be Phuti, from the lapa of Kubu." There is a black he-goat in the kraal. Take that to open the ears of those of Kubu."

Phoko chose a big black he-goat next morning and set out for the village of Kubu. Arrived at the gate of the men, he tied the goat to one of the posts and went into the lapa of Kubu. The old man was just having his morning meal. When he saw Phoko, he said:

"We are eating, son of Ramoroa."

"We have eaten, father of our mother," Phoko replied thus declining Kubu's offer to join in the meal.

Phoko sat down and greeted all the women in the lapa. "We clap hands to you, mother," he said to Kubu's chief wife. "Good morning grandmother," he said to another. If he saw one of the girls, he greeted her: "We see you, sister."

During the meal the women asked many questions. How was his father? Aoa, he had arisen that morning. Was his mother still alive? Aye, she was there. The actual business was not mentioned at all. The women had seen the black goat. They knew perfectly well why Phoko had come. Had not Tau been there very often: "Aye, Tau, the son of Ramoroa has been awooning." "Awooning, child of my mother?" "Aye, it is Phuti. . . ." The girls giggled and laughed about it when they were alone. But now one of the family of Ramoroa was their guest and everybody was very grave and polite.

After Kubu had finished his meal, washed his hands and snuffed copiously, he said:

"You have come, son of Ramoroa."

"I am here, Lion."

"We see you."

"I am here, father, the black goat is tied to the gate post."

"It is well," Kubu replied. Then he called one of the girls and asked her to call together the men of his clan. The men came in and each murmured "Thobela," and sat down.

When everybody was seated, Kubu began. He did not address Phoko direct, instead he addressed his younger brother who was sitting on his left.

"Younger brother," he said, "this young man, the son of Ramoroa has come to us. Let us hear him."

The words were passed round the circle. Each man added to them praising the household of Ramoroa.

Phoko replied:

"Aye, ye men of Kubu, I am here. Ye see me. But I am not my own mouth. I am the tongue of another. Did not Tau, my brother, say to me: 'Younger brother go to those of Kubu and be my mouth?' Aye, he did. He put these words into my mouth: 'I have built a house. I have built a hearth. Who will light the fire on the hearth for I am cold at night? Nay, let it be one of the daughters of the house of Kubu.' These words Tau put into me, and now I have poured them out."

The words were passed back round the circle to Kubu. Each of the men praised the household of Ramoroa and added how rich they were. Others extolled the virtues of the daughters of the house of Kubu. The chieftain briefly announced that he had heard and added:

"There be many maidens in our household. Which is the one that is to dwell in the lapa of Tau, the son of Ramoroa?"

This was again passed round the circle. All the marriageable maidens were mentioned and each of them was praised as a beautiful girl, one who would

indeed be the "Mohumogadi" for Tau. Phuti was mentioned last and the men grew very enthusiastic about her.

Phoko replied: "Aye, ye speak the truth. All the maidens of the household of Kubu are people. They are maidens such as are to be seen in no other household. Yet it is Phuti whom Tau sees."

The men could hardly find words to express how beautiful, how good and virtuous Phuti was. She was a wonder, a miracle. At the same time they hinted that Phoko was merely an emissary. He had come to open the door. Let those of Kubu accept the goat, and let Tau come himself, and be his own mouth.

Phoko went away leaving the goat behind. This was a good sign. Tau went next day and the whole household of Kubu assembled to hear his suit.

Kubu briefly opened the proceedings by saying:

"Younger brother, yesterday the emissary came. He left the goat here. Now Tau, the son of Ramoroa has come himself. Let him speak."

The message was transmitted to Tau. All the men dwelt at great length on the wealth and generosity of the household of Ramoroa.

Tau briefly replied: "Aye, Phoko, my younger brother, came and left a goat which ye men of Kubu accepted. Now I am here. The bull-calves of this village are many. The heifers are even more. Yet my eyes see only one. That is Phuti. She must come and light the fire on my hearth."

This was communicated to Kubu. Now began a great battle. Kubu said: "If a saucer be passed over the lapa hedge, it expects the return of another. I wonder what will be in that saucer?"

In transmitting these words the men were of opinion that when a poor man did a rich man a service, then the wealthy one showed his gratitude not by

returning just the value of the poor man's gift. He gave lavishly, so that he might show that gratitude was opening his hand.

Tau replied:

"It is the man who grows the corn that sets his price upon it. All men know that those of Kubu are indeed people with a good heart. An orphan has come abegging. His hands are empty, for he is poor. Let therefore mercy and pity flow out of the hearts of the men of Kubu."

The men of Kubu thought differently. They all with one voice agreed that the household of Kubu was impoverished. They had nothing. These few head of cattle in the kraal were but the remnants left over by disease and misfortune. The few scabriden goatlets and sheeplets were nothing compared to the sheep of Ramoroa which could hardly carry their fat tails. Aye, Kubu was poor indeed. Only the maidens were the few flowers that adorned the tree of the clan.

After a tremendous amount of oratory it was hinted that twenty heifers would gladden the hearts of the house of Kubu, and dry the tears of the mothers who had to part with such a perfect daughter. She was to be a chieftain's wife. Would she not become the mother of a village? Aye, she would. But men would ask, how many heads of cattle entered the village of Kubu. Then when they had heard, they would reply: "Ah the wives of those of Ramoroa, are wives indeed. See men give a whole kraal full of cattle. Aye, Ramoroa is a great chieftain."

Tau replied:

"Our ears have heard. Indeed the house of Kubu has turned its ear from us to-day. Their eyes are blinded so that they cannot see, their ears are deaf so that they cannot hear. The village of Ramoroa is full of lamentation. Aoa, Ramoroa is poor. Evil has

befallen him. His cattle have been winnowed away by an evil wind." Then he tactfully tendered ten head of cattle.

The men of Kubu were brokenhearted over the hardness of heart shown by those of Ramoroa. Did not the lowing of cattle fill the air? Did not the tramp of sheep and goats kill all other sounds? Aye it was like the thunder of a river in full flood. Now whose animals were these? Aoa, they belonged to Ramoroa. Surely the men of Ramoroa were blind that they could not count their own cattle. They were deaf, and those of Kubu felt this new calamity, that had befallen those of Ramoroa, very deeply.

After bargaining the whole day it was finally agreed that the price should be fifteen heifers. Tau took leave:

"Aye, men of Kubu, the sun has run away from us. See it is time to go to sleep. Our ears have heard. Those of Ramoroa shall hear too, but they will be filled with sorrow because those of Kubu have not been kind to-day."

Next day Ramoroa called together the men of his own household, and told them that Tau had asked the men of Kubu for Phuti. The price of fifteen heifers was mentioned. All the men exhorted Tau to be firm. Fifteen heifers was too much. The family might agree to ten heifers and five oxen. A long deliberation ensued. It had to be decided what animals were to be tendered. Each heifer was mentioned. The colour was given and its pedigree was traced back three or four generations.

Tau again met Kubu and his family. They complained even more bitterly about the hardheartedness of those of Ramoroa. Finally they accepted the terms. Phuti was called in. Her mother had warned her and so Phuti had washed her legs until they shone. Kubu said to her:

“Phuti, my child, this is your husband.”

Phuti was very shy. She hid all her face and replied:

“You have spoken,” and fled.

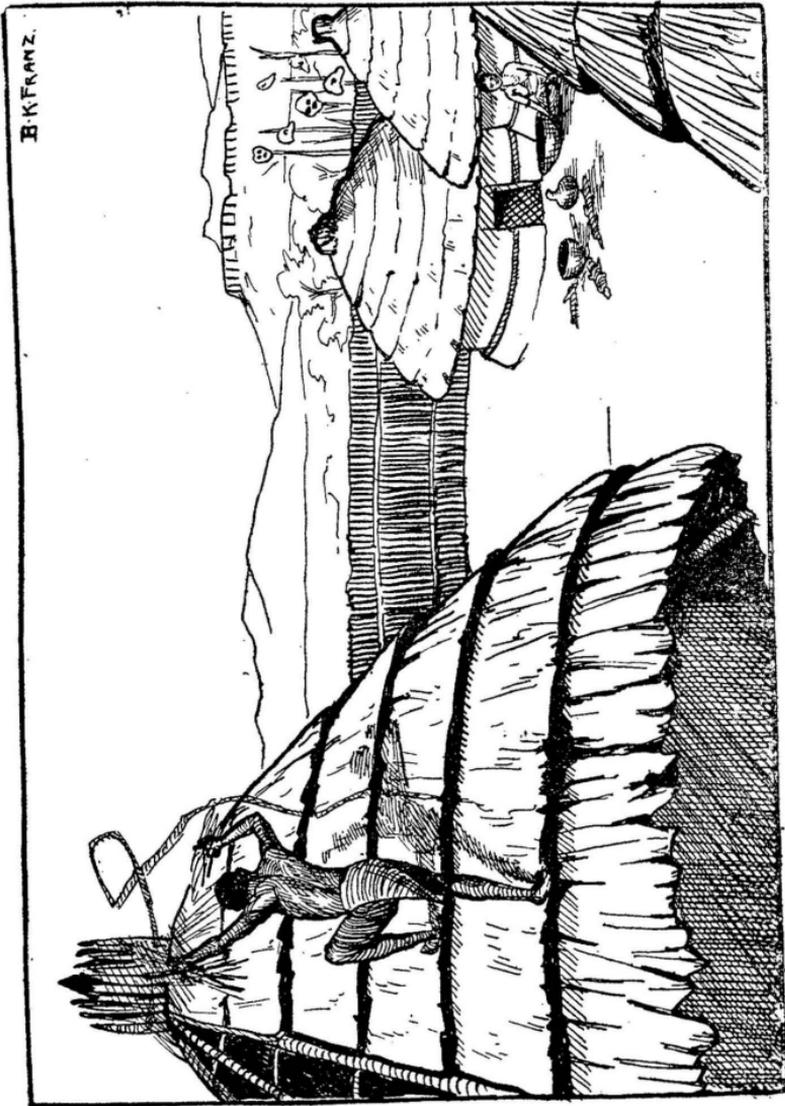
Tau had by no means won Phuti. The battle had only begun. At first he had wooed by making himself agreeable. Now he had to woo materially. He had to soften the mother's heart, because she held the key to the heart of the daughter. Then he was expected to win the heart of his betrothed. A man may be despised by his own family, but he must never be despised by his own wife. To avoid being despised by Phuti, Tau had to give her many presents. Phuti's mother coached her daughter very carefully. She must not give herself away, she must be won. Phuti decided to be won. If she never received any presents from her lover, other maidens would laugh at her. Besides it was so pleasant to show all the fine trinkets, beads, karosses and other presents to her girl friends. The other girls were jealous.

Three months passed. Tau was getting desperate. One day he asked Kubu to call together his household. He spoke to them:

“Fifteen head of cattle are lowing in the kraal of Kubu, that once lowed in the kraal of Ramoroa. Yet they have not brought the fire to the hearth of Tau. Have the men of Kubu forgotten?”

The men of Kubu had forgotten, and only another heiferlet could revive their memory. Under tears and lamentations Tau paid the heiferlet. A little while later an oxlet had to open the gates of memory. This went on until Tau had paid twenty head of cattle. Then he told the house of Kubu that the cattle in the kraal of Ramoroa were finished. Kubu had eaten them all. All that was left for Tau was to shiver at night.

“Aye, men of men,” those of Kubu replied, “indeed



“When the time came for thatching. . . .”

our heart feels sore for you. Yet Kubu needs a house.”

Tau's final task now began. He was asked to build a house for his future father-in-law. He was not allowed to call in anybody to help him. He cut the poles on the mountain and carried them down on his shoulders. Then he cut thatch grass in the plains and carried it home too. Far away on the mountain he found thin laths covered with bark. He stripped the bark and twisted it into strong rope for thatching. Kubu pointed out the place to Tau, and the work of erecting the hut was begun. Tau firmly planted the poles in the ground in a circle, one pole next to the other. Then he put on the rafters. When the time came for thatching, Tau called in his younger brother to push through the needle for him from underneath. At last the house was finished. The crown of grass was placed on the top and Tau called out to Kubu:

“Morena,” the house is finished.”

“Come down, my son,” Kubu replied.

“That cannot be,” Tau said, “your voice is too deep to call me down. I fear it.”

Tau was wise. If he had come down at Kubu's bidding, he would have had to pay a goat to be allowed to climb up again, so that Phuti might be able to call him down.

Kubu now said: “One with a better voice is here. Let her come and call you.” He called out to Phuti and asked her to call down Tau from the roof of the hut.

Phuti came out and said: “Come down husband. The house is finished. Let us go home.”

Tau climbed down. The contract was sealed now. He went home and with his family fixed the wedding day. It was to take place a fortnight later. This was communicated to the household of Kubu, and they agreed.

GLOSSARY.

- Mabele — Kaffir corn.
mmidi — mealies.
mohumogadi — “first wife.”
moshate — chief’s village.
Mallo — exclamation.
Kgoro — “enclosure of the men.”
lapa — “family court”.
morusoana — saucer.
thari — skin in which baby is carried
ringhals — cobra.
noga — snake.
mokgalo — “wag-’n-bietjie” thorn.
locha — clap hands
Lekgoa — white man.
Ee — yes.
Agee — “yes.”
motlogolo — cousin.
tsuii — type of quail
kgang — “spirit”
leshoboro — boy.
lekaba — riding calf
Naka (star) — Canopus.
batseta — chief’s emissaries.

