



# **Homo Whoso**

by Oris Bracken

There! --there they are. A pair of fine Tallhorns grazing in open field. Two for dinner.  
Homo Whoso eyes his prey.

He sniffs. Gemsbok!

He begins to move, slowly, downwind --Stops and rests on the flat of his right hand ...  
then with caution starts working his way around the Tallhorns.

Homo Whoso doesn't need to concentrate on balancing himself. He takes his two-leg  
status in stride. Comes naturally. Here on the veldt in its high grass being upright helps in  
hunting food.

Whoso is an advanced manape but his vocal chords are still deficient for speech. Without  
a symbolic vocabulary, he is barely capable of intuitive grunts and guttural onomatopoeia.  
Whoso's attempts at reasoning are solely reactive aberrations. Nevertheless, the brain of Homo  
Whoso is quite intelligent.

He stops and stoops.

The manape watches his newfound meal standing unaware of his presence. He is  
uncomfortable because of the hot afternoon sun. Feels this discomfort is directly associated with  
overhead passing of the great Firebird.

The same great Firebird he can never look upon. In fact, Whoso's right eye has  
developed a cataract from trying. But Whoso does not associate hazy sight with its intense  
ultraviolet. Whoso only associates tearful pain to looking at Firebird.

However, he does know when it's time to get out of hot sunlight. Time to find shade.  
Find thick foliage.

Whoso frowns.

Shade is shadow that moves very slow.

Shadows are fascinating.

His own shadow is an extension of himself and is sometimes in him and sometimes out. Everything has a shadow and those shadows are part of a world that evokes metaphysical thought. Realizing he can not reach out and touch the sun or the moon or even jump to the top of a tree is somehow less profound to Whoso than realizing he can not pick up his own shadow. Nor can he run away from it! And you can't stop another's moving shadow by standing or sitting on it.

All quite incredible.

Whoso stands to better view his distance to the black and white headed Tallhorn. Among the knurled groundsel of the veldt he sees a few widely spaced pillars of giant lobelia towering above tall yellow reeds. And several acacia. The lobelia marks his rest spots and signals safety. Too far away.

Fortunately just fifty metres ahead of him is a darkened grove of thorn trees surrounding a big pink baobab.

Good shade.

Very quietly Whoso moves toward the ancient baobab. The great tree is a survivor of several prairie-fires. Plus the Flood. The manape moves ten metres and stops to sniff and listen. He tacks downwind of the grazing gemsbok. Whoso has not mastered the art of throwing rocks for food. However, he can carry boulders up a tree and hurl them back down on top of any food beneath. But most often Whoso sneaks up and catches his blood-filled food by surprise. He will have to leap upon one of the unsuspecting Tallhorns. But first Whoso must get very close. He does not run fast as he once did. Whoso is grown old.

\* \* \*

Whoso likes to remember there once was a Her.

She.

One apart from the Others.

They were helpmates. Him and Her.

She spends more time with him than Thum. And he with her than Thum.

She is why Whoso comes to live apart from the other Bulls in the hills. She is why he no longer visits the Mystery Caves of the Womb-men. She and Whoso find a special cave of their own. She makes multicolored markings on its dark back wall. These resplendent animal renderings are actually alive and can be seen to breathe and move about in firelight. Once, Whoso got too excited and attacked one of her bigger images with a rock --He pounds and pounds on the beast! --Finally it stops moving. Victory! He mounts Her.

In fact, within this special cave Whoso can mount Her whenever he wants.

And in this cave She gives to Whoso ten live and four dead Children. She buries her dead babies in the Earth and streaks black ash on a wall.

One of Her newborns had a tail nub so they killed and ate it.

During winter droughts there is no food and they must feed the weakest girls to the strongest boys.

Of the seven sibling survivors, three cubs appear to be different. These frail males barely have hair.

She likes these hairless Ones best.

Hairless Ones require less delousing. But they are more helpless longer. They need more nurturing time and tit from Her.

As the cubs mature the Hairs and No-hairs do not associate with each other and are not friendly.

They play separately.

The No-hairs make softer and longer lasting voice sounds. They sing. They frequently wiggle their fingers at each other. The No-hairs eventually begin to wear pelts and girdle their genitals.

Whoso personally favors the four pelted Cubs because they look more like his Her.

He recalls his Brave Woman's strange ways with stones and sticks. She taught Whoso to use a strong staff to break bones and bludgeon or gore. Showed handy ways to smash rocks making big sharp pointed teeth.

She wove several small nests from vines and twigs and placed them inside their cave. Some of these nest walls are hard packed with clay and covered with skin to keep out bugs. Family food is placed into these nests rather than on floor. Her nests are magic. If an object is put inside one and covered --it vanishes! When uncovered --it reappears! Whoso and all the Children delight in watching her do this over and over. They giggle and laugh.

She has another amazing trick.

Place a long thin tree trunk in special spot on small boulder. Then a light down can make a heavy up. She makes several such seesaws for the amusement of their communal cousins and guests.

But best of all for Whoso are frosted gold honeycombs She brings sticky from the stinging hives.

His favorite Womb-man frequently uncovers fossils of ferns and fish encased in solid stone. Whoso believes ferns and fish will grow from the rocks. She shows him other stones that look like shells and bones.

She finds flies and ants asleep in amber nougats.

This starts Whoso wondering.

This is when Whoso begins staring at the sun to see emerald flame.

He was with Her when the moon fell.

And the world exploded.

Afterward. Whoso awoke alone. No way of knowing where he was.

The air stank of sulphur and rotting flesh.

Whoso looked out upon a vast flood littered with mountains of mud and splintered trees. He faced an incomprehensible deluge of debris.

Eventually the lone Whoso discovered a dozen other battered survivors and joined their starving band.

He traveled with Thum many days. Their relationship ended one hot and rainy afternoon. His newly adopted tribe left him behind without a second thought....

Whoso had climbed aback a great mammoth to secure their next feast. Whoso crawled up its neck. Plunged his sharp stick point in big eye. Beast rears! Shakes stick from bloody eye. Bucks! Whoso slips, falls. Lands bad. Tears right leg ligament. Rolls to side in pain. Quickly crawls away. The wounded beast charges the frightened hunters. His group quickly scatters before mammoth tusks and scurries into jungle green. Leaving Whoso helpless on the ground.

Alone.

Thum took his stick too.

\* \* \*

Now his leg is almost healed. He best keep moving toward the baobab. No mid-day breeze on this veldt. No bird songs. Only the cicada castanets to accompany the always buzzing gnat balls hovering about his ears and moist orifices. Black flies walk freely on his brown face. Whoso accepts it as part of living. His matted coal black head hair is ribboned with flaxen and a touch of grey and sequined with shiny black lice.

Sweat beads brow ridge slope. Pug nosed. Front teeth missing and most others rotten. Brown tough hands with callused fingers and scarred knuckles. Palms of pink.

Whoso comes to the large tree and the dark thorn grove.

Crouches.

He admires and then picks up a straight and stiff fallen baobab branch. Holding this freshly broken tool Whoso looks up and sees through the leaves Great White Creatures.

Ghosts.

He scrutinizes the clouds to see the familiar faces and bodies of plant and animal friends.

That night when Whoso looked to the stars he observed the twinkling outlines of these same animal friends. Their motions appeared to his grasping mind as shifting frames of thick fog.

Motion.

Leans backward to see overhead...sky spins...earth tilts under his feet. He imagines moon is moving and clouds are still, or, sometimes stars are moving and moon is still. And whenever Whoso sees a meteor flair he thinks it's a falling star.

What is a star?

Whoso once came across smoldering pieces. In the late night glowing aerolites looked like stars spread upon the earth. Yet, whenever he touched one --it burned the skin, like Firebird! His right hand bears thick scar tissue as a reminder.

He associates that sun and stars might be the same stuff and the stars be sun eggs nurtured by moon till they fall from the giant nest. Seems to Whoso, after stars hit the ground they must break open and leave their hot-hot hatchlings.

Very confusing.

When Whoso has such a mental perplex ion and wants to end its anxiety he dances. He starts by jumping in place. He paces back and forth. Walks in circles. Spins till he falls down.

But he always jumps first just to shake a few ideas loose.

By carefully repeating this choreographed ritual Whoso abstracts numinous thought feelings. Hears bicameral cues to relive a variety of archetypal anagrams.

Whoso's visions are fabulous.

Learned how to produce ideas at will. Model dynamic egregious. Then receive solutions.

Whoso is the first hominid genius.

Whoso takes a black obsidian blade from around his neck. The knife-chisel hangs from thong tied a necklace between two quartz beads and two ochre beads. Many moons ago She gave this necklace to him. Using its sharp blade Whoso starts to shape a point on the baobab stick he has found.

Instinctively he knows there is at least one other presence nearing itself to him on the veldt.

Another large presence besides his waiting Tallhorns.

A presence eyeing his resting place.

Eyeing his dinner.

Whoso can feel an animal coming near. He can sense a mind attempting to interpret shade and safety. Another hungry mouth?

Whoso alertly cocks his head to listen and sniff the still dry air.

Hears no crackling of dry grass.

He relaxes. Whatever the beast is Whoso can sense no immediate threat. Not coming near.

But now, others....

Though he can not count and knows no numbers Whoso begins to realize there are more than two but less than ten fingers of unknown something's prowling somewhere out there.

Sniffs.

Not dogs.

Definitely not lizards.

Cats. --Big cats.

Were it a cool night instead of a scorching afternoon Whoso would stretch his open palms flat tight then slowly weave them about as though rubbing inside a dome. Whoso would continue this flat hand seeking until he caught the direction of the cat body-heat in pink centers of his stretched palms.

Whoso detects movement by aligning objects with his simian crease. Doing this he would find each cat.

But not now. Not in infrared noise blare of midday sun. Hands not see.

Whoso is alone and vulnerable to attack. Knows he should try to catch up with Thum. Safety in groups. He can overtake Thum since his leg and knee have healed. Easy tracking. Camp following ground-apes, hyenas and jackals drop tell-tail markers behind them on the trail.

Whoso--the manape--meditates. Somehow this manape understands that when he rejoins Thum it can never be the same trusting relationship.

None in the tribe were of his gens so none were obligated to come to his aid. But still Whoso felt castaway when all abandoned him. All ran to hide. He vividly reviviscences crying out to Thum from the ground:

"Nanny! Nanny!"

Whoso can yet hear his own voice frantically calling forth sounds She taught him:

"Elu! Elu! Allah! --Eli!!!"

Whoso remembers his feelings of fear and sorrow. He lay there. Watching his companions pass from sight. Gone. Possibly forever. Leaving him alone. And they took his stick. This is a yet fresh and very painful memory to Whoso....

Whoso inspects the sparse selection of baobab trees for signs of fruit or eggs. His dark eyes scan the nearby veldt for termite hills or berry bushes. He wishes to feed on the grasses as do the Tallhorns. But too much grass makes him retch. Whoso does not want to retch. Yet he does not want to have to kill to eat. Does not want to slaughter one of the two lovely Tallhorns still in graceful graze. Whoso not that hungry. Yet.

Remains crouched.

Daydreaming in the shade. His almost dozing mind again traumatically recalls the time when the moon fell.

\* \* \*

One night he looked up...and in the sky saw another moon! A little sister moon. Had not noticed it before. Whoso showed the little moon to Her.

Soon the small moon doesn't want to sleep during the day!

Small moon starts to grow in size like Her did with child. Bigger and bigger until much larger than first moon. Bigger than Firebird!

Almost fills the sky.

Finally, in the cold of winter the moon cracks open. KaWaaBAMM!

Whoso screams --ears hurt and bleed.

BOOM!

Pieces fall to earth. Like the sun eggs drop.

Makes many flames. Much smoke. Makes nose and throat burn. Skin itch. Makes flood.

Flood!

Whoso and Her and No-hairs are scattered pebbles washed over a waterfall. Cave submerged.

Thick mist.

Next the hoarfrost.

Then mixed light and heavy dew that burns on skin. Later impenetrable dark clouds of buzzing flies busy feeding on rotting carrion. Whoso survives by scooping up their maggots and chewing soggy leaves.

\* \* \*

If he knew how add solstice cycles from then to now Whoso would know twelve years had passed since the impact.

Whoso's life is over thirty-three orbits long. Except orbits are different now that a moon has fallen. He thinks the seasons change sooner and last longer.

Maybe. Perhaps.

Whoso can never know whether his memories are authentic or not. There is no possible way for him to tell if what might have or might not have been ever actually was or wasn't. But in Whoso's hypnagogic mind the falling moon and the Flood did really exist just like the big blue Spike did once upon a time.

\* \* \*

Spike.

The cobalt blue cone point pricks the earth. The round base held high in the air is surrounded by treetops. A dizzying seventy-seven degree angle of slope. Top-heavy. A beautiful glittering blue in the daylight and glowing blue in the dark night. In dark he can see its violet halo.

When Whoso feels cold the Spike feels warm.

When Whoso is hot the Spike is cool.

Spike is the smoothest hard ever felt for Whoso.

Their Clan admires its slick wetness.

Children love to scamper around Spike to tag and tackle.

In fact, Whoso's most happy memories are of laughter-screaming chases with She and the No-hairs around and around and around the big blue cone.

Whoso also recalls beautiful lights.

Before sleep ... squatting in their cave mouth see dozens of tiny lights winking and floating in the dark jungle. Most are tear shaped. Red. Yellow. Green. Blue. When those few lights that stay lit for a long time move about they leave faintly blurred edgewaves of white streaking in their wakes.

Occasionally, a larger and brighter light flashes in the foliage at the far black edge of the field.

Once this bright white one came out from the jungle and levitated across the dark field until it arrived at their cave entrance. From inside their den the two primates squat and squint at

the apparition. Then light orb projects its white ray directly upon Whoso! And upon Her! And then upon the Cubs! The roving ray holds longest on the No-hairs. It changes to blue then back to white.

Thus, for the first time, Whoso and the Family can see deep inside their cave home.

What's that on the back cave wall?

Handprints!

Red-hands!

All the Children huddle and cuddle in fear.

Red-hands!

Later, comes a sighting not made at night. Made mid morning. Deep sky clear of clouds.

She points it first--

See!

See silent silver dot turn to sleek sliver in azure sky. He and She hypnotically watch the shiny object during one whole sun day. Flying disc shifting silver shape almond and back to disc again. It sails slow silent circles.

Many vivid rememordreams of Her and the Cave and the blue Spike and the silver disc and the twinkling colored lights and the gold crystal Honeycomb. And of Her strange No-hairs ... No-hairs. Ah. Yes. These are the images which provide Whoso his life's most pleasurable moments....

\* \* \*

But now Whoso's empty stomach vies for its share of attention! He gazes up to fruiting branches. Baobab gourds green, not good ... bad bread. Whoso must eat soon. Hmm? Hunger brain wants to know if this shady mulch might be a prime place to dig for some white worms.

Grubs good fast food.

Whoso squats. Presses his left thumb into the soft soil. Sniffs and licks to taste.

Whoso stands.

Methodically the old manape appraises the two meaty gemsbok. Then manape quizzically looks back to the earth. He pokes his newly sharpened stick point into the darkest dirt. Turns over a small grass clump. Snorts. In its roots he sees something squirming creamy and plump. –Why, there's another!

Whoso smiles broadly.

His eyes slowly rise from the worm feast to squint across the veldt at the grazing Tallhorns. He again looks down at the new turned dark soil.

Milky worms wiggling away!

Hurry.

Whoso reaches down to grab some grubs.

*A special thank you to Jak Brand for her editing advice and review.*

Homo Whoso

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