

THE STRONGEST WIND

- EBRAHIM PATEL

Jomo woke up with a start. His eyes searched, trying to penetrate the wispy, pale grey mist of dawn that heralded the coming of a new day. For a moment Jomo thought, with something akin to a rising panic, "Where am I?" And, for one long minute, his ears glued to the laboured breathing of the men sleeping around him - he thought of the nameless faces of men he had known in the dark depths of the dungeons of his native land. This silence, curiously enough, wanted to transport him, to wrest him back - memories being such a treacherous thing - and he remembered the faceless names of men and women he had shook hands with and exchanged greetings, some of whom he had only known by sight and yet others so intimately. He immediately shrugged the offending thought off, the same way, perhaps, that one shoves to the back part of one's mind the snarling memory of an excruciating toothache. It was strange, this disorientation: he had been here for forty-odd days, but he still woke up, each morning, like someone riding astride a stray horse. He stood up, tip-toed, and put in his track suit and running shoes.

He was still desultorily lacing up his shoes when the morning reveille went off in a long, wailing scream that tore his viscera. That damn alarm, he thought with unreasoning anger, can't get used to that thing! The men in the tent jumped. It took a minute for all of them to be dressed and ready for formation.

By 5,00 a.m. they were already assembled in the square. They formed three long columns. The three instructors were also there, serious and unsmiling with their AK-47 assault rifles slung over their shoulders. These were hard men, baked black by a thousand suns in the jungle kilns of Zimbabwe. They had seen the racists - people who through recorded time had always stood on the aggressive side of the gun - fleeing in abject terror at the wake of the people's wrath. The sight of these men provoked excitement in his stomach and he swallowed chilly fingers.

"TOYI-TOYI!"

After ascertaining that everyone was present, the instructors called, Attention! and the trainees responded, Hee! The three columns then moved out of the perimeter of the camp at a trot, a-left, right-a! a-left, right-a! until the tempo

of running feet increased. Jomo felt the first rivulets of sweat coursing down his warmly-clad body. It was then that one of the instructors, a veteran of the Zimbabwean exploits, chanted, "Itoyi-toyi!" and the trainees responded in a singular expulsion of bated breath, "Hhoa!"

"Izinkokheli... Hhoa!"

"Zisemajele... Hhoa!" All the time the instructor led them with the chant the trainees would respond in one voice, raising their knees high, jumping and stamping their feet on the morning elephant grass, not unlike so many Mexican jumping bears. This went on for a long time in unbroken rhythm. This was an exercise, in this wilderness, that Jomo found very strenuous, but he pushed on even when his muscles were strained beyond endurance.

Time seemed to stand still in the wild terrain. Jomo had time, though, to look at the lush vegetation, thick elephant and baobab trees; the red dust raised by so many stamping feet. That morning they did a roll-crawl on the still-wet grass and Jomo, his head spinning, rolled on and on and on until he landed in a thorny thicket where he disturbed a large, light-brown bird. The bird gave him a long, baleful stare before it gave a raucous caw, flapped its wings and soared high until it became a dark dot in the wide, blue sky. That damn bird, Jomo thought, has it easier than me here. He thought of home. He thought of the voices of playing children raised in laughter, he saw the smiling faces of young women whose bodies were ripening giving promises of a voluptuous ecstasy. He thought of the wide streets on which people walked, their faces closed like a vault with no one showing signs of the heavy load the nation had on its collective shoulder. He thought... and his brief spell of day-dreaming was rudely interrupted by a barked command, "Move!"

His unit of young militant trainees returned to the camp. They washed and changed and got ready for breakfast. After breakfast morning news was read. Jomo believed that no news was good news; he knew that the world was greaning under an immense weight. Although there were many new things happening in the world, there was one constantly resounding truth: the world was in rocking motion. There was no end to the chronicling of the iniquities and injustices, murders and violations the western powers had perpetrated upon the helpless peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America. What was more, the trials and tribulations suffered by the wretched of the earth everywhere, were also the dastardly deeds of the oppressors and their kinsmen. Jomo heard - everybody heard - of what South

Africa was capable of doing to her black population every-day: he heard of white women using black miners as a target practice. At the United Nations the United States said it was outraged by South Africa's domestic policies, and Jomo remembered that the United States - the whole western cabal - leads the world in being outraged by the consequences of deeds it engenders and supports secretly. He knew, although this knowledge was jaundiced by a lack of critical analysis, that the Beers of South Africa were not exactly his sole enemy, that they are mere watchdogs in the employ of a marauding beast far more sinister and infinitely more ravaging, imperialism. Jomo was not to know a lot of things until he met the old man.

The old man looked like a nothing-old-man, really, and Jomo never spared him a glance. But on this day, after the morning news, Jomo was clearing the driveway when he felt that there was someone staring at him. He turned, straightened up and his eyes met the old man's. The old man was clad in a faded blue pair of bib overalls and scuffed combat boots. His head was covered by a khakhi hat that had seen better days. Jomo felt a stab of irritation, thinking; what does Mr Bojangles want now? The old man took out a long, black cigar as he approached Jomo. He smiled a snaggle-toothed smile that instantly transformed his wizened face.

UNDER A BAOBAB TREE

"Have you got a light, Comrade?" The old man's voice was hoarse, as though it came from somewhere in the bottom of his belly. Jomo wordlessly gave him a box of matches. He turned his back to the old man and resumed his sweeping.

"What's your name, Comrade?" the old man asked, handing Jomo the box of matches.

"J o m o ."

"Ah," the old man said, taking a long pull at his cigar.

"Jomo, you like it here at our place?"

Jomo grunted a non-committal reply. He didn't see any reason to carry on a conversation with this Methuselah. He looked at the other trained comrades clad in military uniforms. He heard the thudding of heavy boots as the men walked. He saw a young woman walking past, in full uniform with her AK-47 slung over her shoulder and wondered how long it would be for him before he also wore battledress and carried his own weapon.

"My name is M b i z o , " the old man said. "I see you have finished working. Let's go sit under that tree." He pointed at a baobab tree. They went to sit under the tree.

"Are you happy here, Jomo?" Mbizo asked, throwing his cigar stub away.

"Well," Jomo said, "I guess I'm happy as could be expected."

"And that," Mbizo said, "translated into simple English simply means you're not happy." He nodded his head several times as though coming to an agreement with something only he knew. Jomo felt rage welling up in him. He knew that Mbizo had no right to judge him. Who was he anyway? Who was he to act the counsellor or the psychiatrist?

"Is the training very hard?"

"It's hard enough", Jomo said. "And I also didn't expect to stay here so long. I thought that by this time I would have long finished, that I would be carrying out operations at home." He paused, wondering what had made him volunteer the last bit of information.

"When I first came out for training, I was just like you. Training was so hard that I thought of running away. But, then, if you run away from here where will you be running to because all the people are here in the people's movement, the ANC. It would mean you have turned your back to over twenty million people of South Africa. And once that happens, you are doomed. Your name will be taboo in the lips of the young ones and no child will ever carry your name because where I come from no child carries the name of a coward."

"But," Jomo said, "I'm not a coward!"

"That's right, you're not a coward. But, then, anyone who shrinks at the thought of training, who does not contribute his utmost insofar as the liberation of our people is concerned, is a coward. Let me tell you a story."

MBIZO'S CHRONICLE

Jomo prepared himself for Mbizo's chronicle. He looked at the big trucks rolling past, belching acrid blue smoke. He fished out a pack and tapped out two cigarettes. He gave one to Mbizo. They both lit up.

"After our training we went to get our first taste of actual combat. ZAPU was intensifying the armed struggle in the country we now call Zimbabwe, which was Rhodesia then. I see you're doing "Itoyi-toyi" every morning. It was in Zimbabwe that we saw the need for physical fitness, where you had to run the whole day in the hot sun while being pursued by helicopters or spotter planes. And it was there where I saw the meaning of commitment. There was a village about 50 kilometres from where we had set up a base. We had an intelli-

gence report that that village was to be bombed, napalmed and generally wiped out of the face of the earth by Smith's murderers. This was going to be a punitive raid because the villagers there had protested vigorously to being sent to the so-called protected villages, what the Portuguese called aldeamentos, the same thing Americans tried without success in Vietnam. Furthermore, the headman in that village was not a paid puppet of western warmongers. He gave support; food, clothing and shelter to the guerrillas.

"So, I was sent to go and warn the people of that village about what was going to happen. I could easily have said that I was sick or that there were no bicycles or donkeys to transport me there. But then I thought of the countless lives that could be lost on account of one man's irresponsibility, me.

"I tell you getting there was hard, lying in wait during the day and trekking in the night. And I had to make sure that I came across neither man nor beast. And the most important thing was that I should stay alive. Getting killed in the forest, my comrades had told me, would have been the most awful thing I would have done. Because I was travelling mainly at night, I got lost for some miles before I could get my bearings. But I managed to get to the village at about 1,00 a.m. of the second day. I came to the village and was almost shot there by one of the tribesmen armed with a .303 hunting rifle. He mistook me for one of Smith's men before I identified myself. Fortunately my Ndebele is not so bad. I was hastily taken to the headman who didn't waste any time getting his people to evacuate the doomed village. In minutes everyone; men, women, children, their cattle, donkeys, goats and chickens from the village was safely ensconced in the village hide-out in the mountains. I sat with the headman, a very astute man of great humour and intelligence, up there on our eyrie looking at the moon-drenched, deserted village below. We didn't wait for long. At about 2.30 a.m. we heard the scream of Canberra and the village was struck by a light more dazzling than lightning and the night turned into day. The bombing must have taken a very short time but to us it seemed like a life-time. Throughout all this I was looking at the headman. His eyes were blazing like the flames consuming his village. It was then that I saw the nature of the enemy we have to face. Later after the bombers had flown away, leaving indescribable destruction in their wake, we went back to the ruins. There was nothing left. Just scorched earth.

A GLOW OF GREAT WARMTH

Jomo and the old man, Mbizo, sat under the baobab tree unaware of the activities around them. Mbizo told him many stories that morning. He told him of the joint ANC/ZAPU Alliance (Wankie Campaign 1967-68). He told Jomo of the many good men, heroes of our revolution, who no longer trod upon this greening earth. Jomo felt a glow of something resembling a great warmth; for the first time in his life he felt a closeness to another man, something he had never felt before. Somehow, his whole life had revolved around distancing himself from people. This was because he knew that getting too close to people meant getting to know their stories - and all stories were bad-luck stories. And, furthermore, it being a well-known fact that misery likes company, Jomo had no wish of shouldering other people's problems; his own, God knows, were an albatross enough.

But now, here was this old man with his harrowing tales of man's bravery, valour, treachery and cowardice. Here he was listening as he had never listened before, his eyes opening, seeing new vistas.

"You have to know these things, Jomo," Mbizo said, standing up and brushing the seat of his pants, "so that you are strengthened in your resolve to fight these beasts who have been murdering us for all these years. You've got to know the people who, the places where, the reasons why. The pain of our people has been borne for too long a time - and this is your year to discover all those places and the time when our pain began. In that way we shall be stronger than the strongest wind."

That night Jomo slept and dreamt of the promised land. He saw the final coming together of all the people who had been flung far into all the wind of our time. He saw the streets teeming with joyous and exultant multitudes whose tumult was more deafening than the collective thunder of a thousand years. He saw a beautiful people who looked as though they had been carved in the smoothest ivory, their voices raised in celebration of an ideal that had caused our people - strong men and women - to spill millions of bushels of blood and to spend innumerable years in the dungeons of the predators. In the morning when he woke up, he knew with a startling clarity that South Africa would be white no more - but would be decorated with the black, green and gold colours of our salvation.

With this solid conviction he jumped and wearing the

broadest of smiles raced to the training field. "It's learning guns and lots of physical exercises today, tomorrow is freedom and lots of peace for my people," he thought aloud as he approached a group of comrades.

NAKED AMONG WOLVES

by

BRUNO APITZ

Chapter 8

Schupp was carrying out an assignment from Kramer. He had got it after being called to the troop garage to repair a radio for Unterscharfuhrer Brauer, the garage manager.

"You can use the chance to do a little listening," Kramer had said; he meant listening to foreign broadcasts. The recent reports from the front, since Remagen, had become very obscure.

Brauer was not alone in his room when Schupp came in with the usual announcement: "Camp electrician begs leave to enter." Meisgeier, the Rottenfuhrer who helped Brauer run the garage, was also present.

Schupp saw at the first glance that both of them were drunk. The gaunt Rottenfuhrer whose face was covered with fat pimples, had his cap on crooked and was sitting at the defective radio trying in vain to coax some sound out of it. In his high, squeezed falsetto he piped at Schupp: "There's fart in the tube here, you better fix it in a hurry. If not, I'll twist your neck, you son of a bitch."

Schupp did not permit himself to be affected by their threats. He put down his tool kit and replied undaunted: "Better leave it alone, who's going to fix the thing when it's really busted? You're always playing around with it!"

"Playing around," squeaked Meisgeier, amused, and gave the dial a contemptuous twirl. This rough treatment aroused the protest of the expert in Schupp.

"You shouldn't do that," he reproved Meisgeier. He could permit himself this free tone because the SS was dependent on his professional skill. The two men laughed, and Brauer, who had been sitting at the table also approached the radio, unsteady on his legs. He grinned at Schupp.

Suddenly his face contorted. In amazement he pointed at