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INDEPENDENCE

RALLY

When at last the Father of the Nation arrived for the Independence Day celebrations, no earlier than 3:28 in the afternoon, the citizens, congregated at the Jidada Square since morning, had had it with waiting; they could've razed the whole of Jidada with their frustration alone, that is, if Jidada had been any other place. But the land of farm animals wasn't any other place, it was Jidada, yes, tholukuthi Jidada with a -da and another -da, and just remembering this simple fact was enough to make most of the animals keep their feelings inside like intestines. The fierce sun, said by those who know about things to have been part of His Excellency's cheerleading squad by decree, had been up glaring since midmorning, doling out forceful rays fit for a ruler whose reign was nearing all of – not one, not two, not three, but four solid decades.

The Jidada Party regalia worn by most of the animals for the occasion – jackets and shirts and skirts and hats and scarves in various colours of the flag of the nation, many of the articles embossed with the face of His Excellency – trapped the sun's terrible heat and made the wait even more

unbearable. But not all of the animals were going to stand for the torturous wait – some indeed started to leave, grumbling about having work and things to do, about places to go to, about the leaders of other lands who arrived at things right on time like God’s infallible machete. These disgruntled animals started as just a smattering – two pigs, a cat, and a goose – but the faction very quickly grew to a respectable mass, and, emboldened by both their number and the sound of their own voices, the dissidents headed for the exit.

At the gate the group found themselves face-to-face with the Jidada Defenders, tholukuthi the dogs appropriately armed with batons, ropes, clubs, tear-gas canisters, shields, guns and such typical weapons of defending. It was a known fact all over the nation and beyond its borders that Jidada Defenders were by nature violent, morbid beasts, but it was especially the presence of the notorious Commander Jambanja, distinguishable in his signature white bandanna, that made the dissenters promptly turn around and retrace their steps, miserable tails between their legs.

ENTER THE FATHER OF THE NATION: THE RULER WHOSE REIGN IS LONGER THAN THE NINE LIFE SPANS OF A HUNDRED CATS. ALSO THE LONGEST-SERVING LEADER IN A CONTINENT OF LONG-SERVING LEADERS, AND INDEED IN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD.

Now His Excellency’s car wove its way through the throngs with the slowness of a hearse, and the animals fell over themselves like intoxicated frogs, hoping to catch a glimpse of the legendary Father of the Nation. At this point the sun, upon seeing arrive the leader who was decreed by God himself to rule and rule and keep ruling, a leader who’d in turn decreed the very sun to head his cheerleading squad, took a deep, deep breath and thoroughly blazed to impress. A select group of dignitaries – all mals, most of them old – accompanied His Excellency on hind legs. Accompanying the

accompanying dignitaries were decorated Defender leaders in military gear, colourful embroidered ropes cinched at the waist, caps pulled low, shiny constellations of medals glinting on solid chests, star insignias bouncing off the shoulders, white gloves on front paws; these were the generals, the true lynchpin of His Excellency's rule. Throughout the square, animals whipped out their phones and gadgets to take pictures and videos of the procession of power.

**BEHOLD, HIM. YES, THOLUKUTHI HIM AND ONLY HIM HIMSELF.
THE ANOINTED ONE. THE ONLY ONE. THE SUPREME ONE. THE
MOST MAGNIFICENT ONE.**

With the arrival of His Excellency, Jidada Square came alive. Tholukuthi the Father of the Nation had such an aura his mere presence in any space automatically rearranged the atoms in the air and shifted any given mood – no matter how hostile or dismal or foul – to a positive and electric one. Those who know about things say this quality had especially been a dozenfold more potent a long, long, long time ago, during the first years of His Excellency's rule when his appearance alone made unripe things instantly ripen to the point of rotting, cured the sick of whatever ailments molested them, turned rocks to mush, deactivated storms and heat waves, rerouted floods, wildfires and plagues of locusts, cured fatal viruses before they even thought of attacking, made dry rivers overflow with water, yes, tholukuthi the Father of the Nation's appearance alone had once upon a time started engines, bent steel beams, and in separate documented occasions, made scores and scores of virgins pregnant so that long before he married the donkey and sired children with her, streams of His Excellency's blood were already flowing throughout Jidada. And now, here was the Father of the Nation lighting up Jidada Square by merely happening, by simply being there. The place ignited in flaming applause, and even the

animals who not too long before had been trying to leave were now part of the uproar, standing on hind legs and cheering His Excellency, not just with their voices and bodies, no, but also with their hearts and minds and souls. Cows mooed, cats meowed, sheep bleated, bulls bellowed, ducks quacked, donkeys brayed, goats bleated, horses neighed, pigs grunted, chickens clucked, peacocks screamed and geese cackled – the cacophony reaching deafening levels as the entourage of power came to a final stop in front of a raised platform.

THE POOR AND THE RICH DO NOT PLAY TOGETHER

Under a sprawling white tent sat the Seat of Power Inner Circle of the Jidada Party, which of course was the ruling party, otherwise known as the Party of Power, of which His Excellency was president. With them were some of His Excellency's family members, friends and honoured guests. Tholukuthi the group of elites were, in all honesty and jealous down, a magnificent sight – the most exquisite cloth, expensive jewellery, and precious accessories of adornment, together with beautiful, well-groomed and healthy bodies, told of wealth and good living. These animals represented some of Jidada's Chosen Ones, and were indeed proof of the Father of the Nation's benevolence, for most of them had been made rich by His Excellency, if not directly, then through some kind of connection to him. They were proud recipients of gifts of land, businesses, tenders, government loans that didn't need repaying, inheritors of confiscated farms, grantees of mines, industries, and all kinds of riches.

With not much to occupy them being that the celebrations hadn't started, the miserable animals in the sun feasted on the Chosen with coveting eyes, and at moments actually forgot the heat cooking their bodies, the hunger gnawing at their bellies, the thirst parching their throats, yes, tholukuthi besotted with the pretty picture of their shaded betters sitting

in comfortable chairs and sipping cold beverages. The hot, salivating animals lapped at the sight like it were a cool glass of honey-wine, and when they licked their dry, cracked lips, they were pleasantly surprised to taste faint traces of actual sweetness.

THOLUKUTHI HUH???

The car doors opened to a bloodred carpet, and the Father of the Nation emerged. As if on cue, Jidada Square gave a collective gasp. Tholukuthi Jidada Square gave a collective gasp because they'd seen emerge from the car a long horse so frail it looked like the slightest breath of breeze would send him teetering and crashing unto earth. It was a good thing then that it was just hot and there was no breeze. The animals watched agape as the Father of the Nation – older now than the last time they'd seen him, when he'd in fact been older than the last time they'd seen him prior to that – walked towards the platform, one careful, careful, foot after the other, his thin body weighted down by a huge green shirt on which were numerous black-and-white prints of his own face, though a much younger and handsome version. The Old Horse crawled and crawled on the very same hooves with which he'd once upon a time galloped up and down the length and breadth of Jidada at the speed of lightning. When he finally got to the platform, after what felt to the animals in the sun like it were two and a half years later, he leaned on a stand for support, hung his oblong head, and stood swishing his tail as if he were counting the minutes with it.

'What is this place? Who are all these animals? And why are they looking at me like maybe they know me?' the Old Horse said to no one in particular.

'Ah-ah, but what kind of question is that, Your Excellency?! They're your subjects ka, every one of them! Don't you know you rule this land, all of this Jidada, and that what your subjects want is to hear you speak?

Today is Independence Day, Baba; we're here all of us celebrating our freedom, the freedom you sacrificed your life for in the long War of Liberation that you your very self pioneered and prosecuted to its victorious end those many years ago, which means, in essence, we're really here to celebrate you!' the donkey gushed with great glee. She reached to adjust the horse's shirt and smooth out his pitch-black but thinning mane.

Tholukuthi the donkey wasn't just any regular jenny but the wife of His Excellency, which may have been implied by how she looked and moved and spoke and generally carried herself with the unquestionable swagger of power. The Old Horse let her lead him to his seat. The animals closest to the pair promptly got up to make way – some straightened His Excellency's chair, some kissed his face, some fondled his tail, some caressed his ass, some adjusted his clothing, and some swatted flies that were not there.

'What I really want is a nap,' the Old Horse said, carefully putting himself down like his backside was made of expensive porcelain. The Father of the Nation wasn't lying. He was at an age when what was most important to him was to be left alone, and besides, those who know about things said the state of affairs inside his head wasn't unlike a tumultuous country without a clear leader.

THOLUKUTHI AHAI

It happened that around the perimeter of the platform were mounted poles bearing the flag of the nation. The brilliant colours of black-red-green-yellow and white caught the eye of the Old Horse. He concentrated on the flags until the colours magically pulled him out of the mist clogging his head. Tholukuthi memory began to return to him. He recognised the flag; it flew in his heart and head and dreams. He didn't at that moment understand what the colours themselves meant, but they were indeed supposed to stand for something, that much he was very sure of. He focused

on them and thought and thought – could it be the white perhaps stood for the teeth of his ferocious dogs, the Defenders? And the red for the blood they could very easily spill? ‘Perhaps,’ he said to himself, and his eyes moved on.

He recognised the tall, beautiful donkey by his side – smelling like fresh flowers and decked out in bright colours and flashy jewellery; it was Marvellous, Jidada’s First Femal herself, otherwise called Sweet Mother for being his wife and for being sweet, and now generally referred to as Dr Sweet Mother after earning her famous PhD. He saw too his beloved friends and family, and their presence filled him with joy. He also recognised his Comrades, and swivelled his head this way, that way, scrutinising them to make sure those who were supposed to be there were there. Tholukuthi they were. Some nodded. Some waved. Some pumped their limbs in the Party of Power salute.

Next, the Old Horse surveyed the packed throngs in the square. They weren’t just his subjects, they were bona fide supporters who’d stood with him and by him over the decades, with many of them going as far back as during the struggle for Jidada’s Independence. They’d been loyal then and had stayed loyal and were still loyal and would always and forever be loyal. They died loyal and took that loyalty to the grave so that even their ghosts, too, were loyal. They left behind offspring who were born already loyal. The Father of the Nation then caught a glimpse of himself on a mirrored panel, and he didn’t start in confusion because he at that moment happened to know exactly who he was and without needing Dr Sweet Mother to remind him whatsoever. Now – fully in charge of his memory, he sat back and stretched his limbs in front of him and nodded to the sun directly overhead. He adjusted his glasses, made himself comfortable, and tholukuthi, with the seasoned serenity of a very old baby, promptly fell asleep.

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LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

He dreamt of the days of glory when Jidada was such an earthly paradise animals left their own miserable lands and flocked to it in search of a better life, found it, and not only just found it, no, but found it in utter abundance and sent word back for kin and friends to come and see it for themselves – this promised land, this stunning Eldorado called Jidada, a proper jewel of Africa, yes, tholukuthi a land not only indescribably wealthy but so peaceful they could've made it up. His Excellency also saw himself in his dream as he'd been back then – beautiful and brimming with unquestioned majesty, a horse that stepped on the ground and the earth agreed and the heavens above agreed and even hell itself also agreed because how could it disagree? Tholukuthi lost now in Jidada's past glory, the Old Horse nestled deeper in his seat and began to snore a sonorous tune that the Comrades around him identified as Jidada's old revolutionary anthem from the Liberation War days.

DEFENDERS, DEFENDERS, DEFENDERS

Being that His Excellency was arrived, the Jidada Army Band started playing. Blood-stirring music accompanied the procession as it poured onto the main part of the square. The Jidada army, just like the rest of the security forces, was made up entirely of dogs. And now, dogs, dogs, dogs and more dogs marched towards the tent, shimmering black boots lifting and landing with stunning synchronicity. Tholukuthi there were pure breeds and mixed breeds and cross breeds and mysterious breeds of no certain classification. Tholukuthi there were dogs in green tunics, dogs in khaki tunics, dogs in blue tunics. Tholukuthi there were dogs playing musical instruments, dogs flying the flag of Jidada, dogs flying the military flags and dogs toting long, glinting guns.

It is often easy to forget the beauty and grace of a dog – a creature that can rip flesh into chunks, spill blood out of sheer impulse, crush bone like it were fragile China, hump anything from a human leg to a car tyre to a tree trunk to a sofa, all without a single grain of shame, shit all over the place as if it excretes unadulterated gold, be faithful to its master even if that master were a known brute, murderer, sorcerer, tyrant, or devil, viciously attack without apparent provocation, devour human excrement no matter how well fed it is. But at that moment in Jidada Square on the occasion of the nation’s Independence celebration, tholukuthi the dogs were simply magnificent. You wouldn’t have known they were in fact sweating and drowning in the hot, heavy tunics that also covered tattered underwear that barely held together what needed holding. You wouldn’t have known the soles of their boots were worn, or that the majority of them were actually famished being that they hadn’t been paid their salaries for at least the previous three months.

I WILL RAISE UP FOR THEM A PROPHET LIKE YOU AMONG THEIR BROTHERS. AND I WILL PUT MY WORDS IN HIS MOUTH, AND HE SHALL SPEAK TO THEM ALL THAT I COMMAND HIM.

Much later, after the dogs had concluded their display and marched off the field, and after speeches from the Minister of the Revolution, the Minister of Corruption, the Minister of Order, the Minister of Things, the Minister of Nothing, the Minister of Propaganda, the Minister of Homophobic Affairs, the Minister of Disinformation and the Minister of Looting, and after performances by various entertainers, the donkey nudged His Excellency awake. The Father of the Nation opened his eyes and woke from his dream of Jidada’s days of glory but found he couldn’t at all remember it. He was struggling with his memory thus when his eyes settled on a fancy-looking pig hindling to the platform with the stride of an

ostrich. The Old Horse didn't recognise him and wondered who he was. He fell asleep again, analysing the pig's long legs.

The long, lean pig was none other than the one and only Prophet Dr O. G. Moses, founding leader of the famed Soldiers of Christ Prophetic Church of Churches. Most things in Jidada naturally included a prayer – that's how come the charismatic Prophet, who was also Dr Sweet Mother's spiritual adviser, was on the programme. Those who know about things said the pig's church was the top evangelical sect in Jidada and boasted the largest following of congregants, not just in the nation but in the whole entire region – yes, tholukuthi a congregation that, according to those who know about things, wasn't only inspired by the word of God but also by desperation, disillusionment, idiocy, frustration and a search for a lifeline – something, anything, to help the animals cope with the business of surviving a life that was daily becoming unlivable as Jidada's economy struggled.

Prophet Dr O. G. Moses did indeed provide that something, that anything – through his gospel of hope and prosperity, through his famous line of miracle products that included anointing oils, and anointing water, anointing purses, anointing wallets, anointing underwear, anointing bricks, tholukuthi through prayer, through his rumoured awesome power to cast out the demon of poverty, through his blessed healing touch. By the sheer force that was Jehovah-Jireh alone, the Prophet promised to transform the miserable lives of the government-forsaken Jidadans, and so the desperate masses flocked to the Soldiers of Christ Prophetic Church of Churches like flies to dung. When those who know about things said the Prophet's followers loved the pig to hell and back, tholukuthi they meant the Prophet's followers loved the pig to hell and back. As it is he'd attended the celebrations in a private jet bought by the tithes from his flock so that you may have been forgiven to think his was a church full

of the wealthy in a land of gold-paved streets and homes packed with diamond-dust-speckled toilet paper.

GOD SPEAKS

Prophet Dr O. G. Moses leaned into the microphone and cleared his throat. Given his popularity, it was the case that any gathering on Jidada soil was bound to have a significant number of his followers in attendance, so that it was no surprise the throngs went berserk on seeing him. They were no longer patriots of the nation at a patriotic celebration, no, but believers in the redeeming and healing presence of God's beloved son. The pig was certainly used to applause, but he'd never heard anything like the applause of that moment outside of his church; tholukuthi it surpassed the applause His Excellency himself had received not too long before. It rang and rang and would have continued had he not held up a white hanky for pause.

'Before I pray, may I take this golden opportunity to thank the most God-fearing femal I know, our very own Dr Sweet Mother, for the honour of leading this great nation of ours in prayer on such a momentous occasion. I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Good leaders are not born. Good leaders are not made. Good leaders, like the Father of the Nation, like our honourable First Femal and Dr Sweet Mother – come from none other than God himself. Who also tells us in his very own words in Romans thirteen, verse one, and I need you to hear me properly O Precious Jidadans; God, my Father, says: Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free

from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. And now, with that precious word, most beloved Jidada, let us please bow our heads in Jesus's name and thank the Almighty for the matchless gift of freedom for which we're here gathered today, for the Liberators who delivered us from the colonizing devils, as well as for our God-given leaders who indeed make sure that we continue to live free every day and for all time. Let us pray!

THE UNDYING ONE

Tholukuthi at the very point the Prophet concluded his prayer with an Amen, the Old Horse, awake again, and at the instruction of Dr Sweet Mother, stood and carefully ambled to the podium. He was still trying to remember the dream but to no avail.

'Forward with the Party of Power!' His Excellency said.

'Forward!!!' the animals yelled.

'Forward with winning elections!'

'Forward!!!'

'Forward with the one-party state!'

'Forward!!!'

'Forward with Dr Sweet Mother!'

'Forward!!!'

'Down with the Opposition!'

'Down!!!'

'Down with the West!'

'Down!!!'

‘To begin with, I know there are some among you who are thoroughly shocked once again to see me and as such may be wondering what I’m doing up here because as you all heard, I died once more last week!’ His Excellency tilted his head skyward, swished his tail at the sun, and roared with laughter. Tholukuthi the sun twerked in the lewdest fashion and sent out such an epic blaze a few animals passed out at different points in the stadium while a hen, thoroughly overwhelmed by the heat, laid a fried egg. The throng took their leader’s cue and broke into laughter; hooves and paws and feet went up in the air, flags were waved, and His Excellency’s totem, along with screams of ‘Long live!!!,’ was sung.

The very week before, Jidada’s social media had been abuzz with the trending rumour the Old Horse had died of a heart attack at a hospital in Dubai. It certainly wasn’t the first of its kind; as His Excellency’s age progressed with the passing seasons, Jidada lived with the periodic news of his death – which would turn out to be what the Inner Circle called fake news, of course. The latest rumour, however, was certainly the first to be stoked to the extent that it started to sound like a truth.

‘As you know, I have indeed died many times. That’s where I have beaten Christ. Christ died once, and resurrected just once. But me I have died and resurrected and I don’t know how many times I will die and resurrect but I know I will keep resurrecting and resurrecting and resurrecting – in fact, I promise you my dearly beloved Jidadans that I’ll attend each and every one of your funerals because you will all die and leave me here ruling in this beautiful land of the Fathers!’ the Old Horse said, to more applause. He paused and revelled in it.

PORTRAIT OF A PROTEST: THE SISTERS OF THE DISAPPEARED

Those who were there said just as the Father of the Nation was feeling his way into his speech, a squad of about twelve stark-naked femals stormed

the podium, seemingly from nowhere. Tholukuthi everywhere udders and breasts and teats and thighs and bellies and backsides and undertails and hips and flanks, everywhere unsightly pubic hairs, everywhere unmentionable femal parts of all sorts of shapes and sizes. And just as Jidada Square, caught off guard by this never-been-seen curse, taboo of unbridled femal nudity, gaped in disbelief, wondering if what they were seeing was indeed what they were seeing, two donkeys raised up a white banner that said, in letters the colour of bright blood: 'Sisters of the Disappeared.' The rest of the squad carried placards bearing photographs and names – according to those who know about things – of Jidadans who'd disappeared throughout the Father of the Nation and the Seat of Power's reign.

The naked femals hinded up and down the stage, straight-backed, tholukuthi faces hard and defiant, tholukuthi eyes ablaze, tholukuthi throats roaring in hot, belligerent voices: 'Bring back Jidada's Disappeared! Bring back Jidada's Disappeared! Bring back Jidada's Disappeared!' Despite their obvious discomfort over femal nudity, the animals in the square heard the roaring right in their intestines, where lived the memories of disappeared friends and relatives or relatives of friends and also known and unknown Jidadans they'd read about in newspapers and on social media, yes, tholukuthi heard the chants deep in their hearts, where also lived the unanswered prayers, the bleeding wounds, the nightmares, the ceaseless anguish, the questions over loved ones, over known and unknown Jidadans who'd dared dissent against the Seat of Power only to vanish like smoke, never to be seen again. So that there were some among the animals in the square who in fact found themselves also chanting, 'Bring Back Jidada's Disappeared! Bring back Jidada's Disappeared! Bring back Jidada's Disappeared!' – but softly, softly, ever so softly so the sound would not leave their teeth, because their fear was greater than their voices.

Tholukuthi the Sisters of the Disappeared did not stop roaring even as the Defenders, having recovered from their momentary confusion in the face of taboo, having remembered they were in fact famed dogs with a Revolution to defend, accordingly pounced with batons and teeth and whips and became Defenders again. And the Sisters of the Disappeared did not stop roaring even as they felt the mad dance of batons and whips and teeth on their flesh. And the Sisters of the Disappeared did not stop roaring even as they were dragged off the stage. And the Sisters of the Disappeared did not stop roaring even as they were crammed into waiting jeeps and carted off to prison.

A PROPER DISGRACE

‘My children, my dear children of the nation. I, like every single one of you, am thoroughly disappointed by the utter, utter shame that just happened on this respected stage! There is no other word for it, even that sun over there didn’t know where to look!’ the Father of the Nation said, bobbing his head at the sun. And the sun, pleased to be singled out yet again, smiled with all her thousand teeth.

‘It is a disgrace any day, but is made doubly so on this honourable occasion of the celebration of our Independence. It is an affront to me, and it is an insult to the Liberators, some of whom, as we all know, paid with their dear and precious lives for the very freedom those shameless femals just disrespected with their ugly nakedness,’ the Old Horse said. The animals in the tent applauded their agreement.

‘And to that end, I wish to remind all and any femals with ears that a true Jidadan femal, the kind of femal we love and honour and celebrate, is one who respects herself and respects her body. Which is why the Bible even tells us the body is a temple. I don’t know about you, but it definitely didn’t look to me like temples on this stage just a moment ago, it looked

like some public toilets!’ the Father of the Nation said, to laughter and whistles.

‘But do not ever be fooled, my dear children, to think that those shameless, ugly femals you just saw come alone. They are being used, they are part and parcel of the unending tactics by the West whose main agenda, as I’m always telling you, is to destabilise us by, among other things, attacking our core values, beliefs, lifestyles, our culture. But of course you and I know that is not all. That very West, together with the Opposition, wish to see me gone, they want me removed in an illegal regime change!’ Tholukuthi the square roared.

‘But I’m not going anywhere! Because me, I was Jidada’s leader almost forty years ago, and I was Jidada’s leader thirty years ago, and twenty years ago, and ten years ago! Because I was Jidada’s leader yesterday, and I am Jidada’s leader today, and I will be Jidada’s leader when?’ the Father of the Nation invited, ears now cocked at the square.

‘Tomorrow and Forever!!!’ Jidada Square thundered in celebration of the Old Horse’s endless rule. Animals stomped their hooves and feet until they couldn’t see themselves from the dust. Animals leapt in the air. Animals slapped and embraced each other. Animals butted butts. Animals who could fly flew into the air. Animals reared. Animals ululated. Animals whistled. Animals cried and yelled and sang. And the Old Horse felt himself born again in the heart of the tumult, yes, tholukuthi felt like he’d felt on the day of his very first inauguration those many, many, many, many, many years ago.

THE ANTI-IMPERIAL CRUSADER

‘Yes, that is the situation, my dear children of the nation. And not only that, but only God, who appointed me, can remove me, and not the West, who have no moral authority whatsoever to open their mouths to say a

regime change is needed in Jidada! Because what, because who are they under the two-cents shade of a blade of grass? Where, and who would they be right now had they not committed the odious sin of colonising us? What would that USA be without the stolen land it now has the audacity to cordon off with a violent border? What, indeed, would that country be without the looted sons and daughters of Africa it now keeps in abject poverty when they themselves birthed the country's wealth? And who would the West be without Africa's resources? Africa's gold? Africa's diamonds? Africa's platinum? Africa's copper? Africa's tin? Africa's oil? Africa's ivory? Africa's rubber? Africa's timber? Africa's cocoa? Africa's tea? Africa's coffee? Africa's sugar? Africa's tobacco? Without Africa's looted artifacts in their museums? Do you know, my dear children, that up to now, decades after their epic looting, plundering, raping, kidnapping, killing, and oppressing spree, Britain is still yet to bring back the head of Mbuya Nehanda? Yes, after they sentenced the spirit medium of our ancestor, Mbuya Nehanda Nyakasikana – who as you know is the mother of Jidada's Liberation struggle – after they sentenced her to death by hanging, as if that was not enough, they decapitated her sacred head and sent it to that Britain as a trophy for the crown! And that is where it still remains along with about two dozen heads of other Jidada resistance fighters! Maybe the Queen can tell us what she is doing with our incarcerated dead because I myself cannot tell you since I do not know. But what I can tell you is that before that West can dictate to us about democracy and change, it must first bring back every single one of our looted things. I want them back! I need them back! Africa wants and needs them back! Every! Single! One! Bring back!' the Father of the Nation shrieked with such a fire the stadium ignited in a blazing chorus of: 'Bring back! Bring back! Bring Back!'

Yes, tholukuthi the children of the nation, indeed reminded of the sins of their former oppressors, chanted and filled the square with all sorts of

angers, including those inherited from ancestors who'd lived through the terrible time. And the Father of the Nation, in his signature fashion, accordingly and incisively went on to denounce the West for neocolonialism, for capitalism, for racism, for economic sanctions, for ugly trade practices, for aid addiction, for the shutting down of factories and businesses in Jidada, for the absence of jobs, for the poor performance of farms, for the brain drain, for the homosexuals, for the power cuts and water cuts, for the miserable state of Jidada's public schools and government hospitals and bridges and public toilets and public libraries, for the loose morals among the youth, for the potholes on the roads and the unpicked trash on the streets, for the black market, for the fluctuating crime rates, for the atrocious pass rate in national examinations, for the defeat of the Jidada national soccer team at the recent continental finals, for the drought, for the strange phenomenon of married men having second families on the side called small houses, for the rise in sorcery, for the dearth of production of exciting works by local poets and writers.

THE LIBERATOR

'Still, today, as you all know, is a very important day, so important that I cannot think of any other day that is more important, except maybe my birthday, which, for those who don't know, is the day that I happened, and without it we would not otherwise be here celebrating because I would not have been there to lead the Liberation struggle so that Jidada would never be a colony again!' the Father of the Nation said, punching the air with all his might when he said 'again!'

At that precise moment the forgotten dream came to him as clear as air, and he was so excited he let go of the platform and did what his doctors abroad didn't recommend he do anymore, which was to stand on his hind legs. The Jidada of the days of glory was suddenly alive and real

in his head so that he could actually smell it, taste its thick milk and rich honey on his tongue.

‘My dear, my most faithful Jidadans, no matter what our devious enemies – from the Opposition to the West to these shameless femals you just saw with your own eyes – may wish upon us, I am very pleased and honoured to say these indeed are the days of glory, days in which we are fully in charge of our destiny. For don’t we own every inch of this rich land? Are we not enjoying the precious fruits, both on and underneath, this blessed piece of earth? Are we not living in prosperity? Are we not the envy of less fortunate nations? Is anyone among you hungry? Or unfree? Or suffering? Or dissatisfied? Or poor? Or oppressed? Are we not set to leave future generations the kind of glowing legacy to make them stand tall among the nations of the world?’ The quadruped of the animals in the sun, upon hearing these words, had unhinded and now stood on all fours, pondering in the dizzying heat.

THOLUKUTHI MULLING A LEGACY

– We love the Father of the Nation, nobody loves him like we do, it’s just in our blood! And is there a greater legacy than love? – nossir, there’s none! But I’ll say the one thing that’d make me love him even better would be a job. Just a small job is okay, it doesn’t need to be a big thing at all because who am I to want big things? That way I can pay for the one room I’m renting and maybe afford proper clothes instead of these rags. Buy good food for my children every once in a while so they too can know just a little bit of dignity – not a whole lot. Maybe also send them to school. Small, basic things like that.

– Ha – no, it’s an excellent legacy 100 percent! It’s almost hard to explain, given where this country’s coming from, the sheer joy of seeing a Black

president just ruling-ruling-ruling, along with a whole entire Black government! As opposed to what, as opposed to seeing a racist colonial government like before Independence. Only thing is I wish they could also make the country work exactly like when those racists were running things! Then ha, I'm telling you, they figure that out, then we'd have a fierce legacy no questions asked, 100 percent!

- Loyalty is legacy if I must say, and that's the truth itself. Today some idiots will actually laugh at you for wearing the Father of the Nation's regalia, taunt you, saying, All these years of Independence, what have you to show for it besides the regalia, isn't it time for real Change? Trying to manipulate an animal into switching sides. And I just beat my wings and say, Tsk-tsk-tsk! Because, have you woken up one day and looked at your parent and said, You're old, you're useless, you're this and that and so I'm getting another parent, it's time for Change? No, you don't! Never! It's the Father of the Nation for Life! Party of Power for Life!
- Well, me myself I don't mind that Dr Sweet Mother actually kicked us off our land to make way for her farm! I really don't mind at all, not a bit, kana, ngitsho, I mean it made us homeless, but otherwise where was she going to farm? In the air? On a tree? Inside her mansion? And futhi it's not at all like a white coloniser kicking you off your land! Which, that one is a whole 'nother matter for sure, a matter of war, which is exactly what we did to liberate our land. But why on earth would I ever think to war against Dr Sweet Mother?
- Even the dung beetles will tell you there is no Father of the Nation, not a single one, in this whole entire Africa, with the balls to tell the West to hump off, to tell the West what time it is like our very own and only

him himself. No one else can claim that for a legacy. And which is exactly why we need him here ruling. Because who will tell them otherwise?

- Jidada is actually one of the best-educated nations in Africa! That's a proper legacy! Everyone, everywhere, they know it. And our constitution is also one of the best in the world. I don't care what haters say, talking about we're not even following our own constitution, at least it's our constitution we're not following. And the day we actually decide to follow it, everyone will see why they call it one of the best in the world. This is all legacy!
- Who'll ever forget that time we kicked white farmers off our land? Ha! I feel like levitating just thinking about it. We showed them who Africa really belongs to! You didn't come with land on a ship when you colonised us and you have the audacity to call yourself a farmer kukuru – kukuru! Ha! And now we have our land back. Well, when I say 'we,' I don't necessarily include me myself per se, since I personally don't own any land. It's mostly those ones under that tent over there, but they're still Black like me, so, there's that. Of course the enemies of the regime will come with their propaganda, talking about the Chosen don't actually know how to farm that land, talking about the agriculture sector and therefore the economy has suffered from the land seizures. But so what, when the big picture is that Blacks have the land?! And that's a legacy! Never a colony again!
- They don't call us the jewel of Africa for nothing, no ma'am. What is it we don't have in this Jidada? Land, minerals, water, good climate, everything. And why are the Chinese and these multinational companies swarming all over this country like flies?! It's because they know a

jewel when they see it! Don't even be fooled by how things may appear right now – I mean the terrible roads that kill people, the potholes, the broken sewer systems, the decrepit hospitals, the decrepit schools, the decrepit industrial sector, the decrepit rail system, or should I say a generally decrepit infrastructure. Then of course there's the poor standard of living, the millions who've crossed and still cross borders in search of better, the misery and such things that may look depressing at first glance, that'll make you think you're maybe looking at a ruin. All these things happen to countries, it's a fact of countryness, but rest assured we were in top form once. Plus, the point is not to judge a book by its cover. Because what remains is that Jidada is still a jewel, Africa's jewel. And that right there is the Father of the Nation's God-given legacy, reigning over a real gem. And moreover, he liberated and has protected that jewel so that Jidada will never be a colony again!

A RALLYING CALL

'And the answer to my very own question, my dear children, is that we are on track to leave an illustrious legacy to coming generations. Otherwise, if that legacy were anything less, do you know what it means?' His Excellency paused to keenly observe the crowds.

'It means the revolution has been betrayed! It means there's need for another war of Independence, yes, a new Liberation War, because that's what your ancestors would have done and would want you to do because who is it that said, Every generation must discover its mission and fulfil it or betray it!?' The Old Horse searched the square for an answer. And then, 'Aha! I know who said it, I think that was me myself who said it that's why I'm remembering it, and so, having said that whenever I did, today I will add that I, as your leader, will not stand in your way or stop

you from fulfilling your mission! You have my blessing! And I'll tell you all right now that the one thing, if I've learned one useful thing in ruling and ruling and ruling, is that nowhere else does the power of any regime, no matter how tyrannical, lie than in the fear of the multitudes! I promise you once the governed lose their fear, then it's absolutely game over for the regime! If you want to see for yourself, go and try it, not tomorrow, but right now, and then come and thank me! Down with fear!' the Old Horse sloganeered, his eyes blazing with the unmistakable fire of resistance.

The Seat of Power and Chosen exchanged disconcerted looks, asking themselves if what they were hearing was indeed what they were hearing. Tholukuthi the deep silence that had by now descended on the square was so total, so true, you could pick it like a fat tick. As for the animals in the sun, they fidgeted and looked at each other in disbelief. It was, of course, now very common for the Old Horse to misspeak. But sometimes these misspeaks, like at this very moment, were in fact honest, astute insights, tholukuthi insights that were shared by the majority of the Jidadans though of course they'd never dream of saying so, or agreeing with them in public.

About then the vice president, Tuvius Delight Shasha, better known to all Jidadans by Tuvy, for short, began applauding, an act that was soon followed by the whole tent and picked up by the rest of the animals, reluctantly at first, because they didn't seem to understand why they were applauding given the nature of the Old Horse's controversial, even dangerous, message.

'What the hell happened to his goddamn speech? Didn't somebody write a speech for His Excellency?' the vice president growled with contempt, pivoting his bus of a head to face the cow seated directly behind him.

'We did, Comrade Vice President, sir. But you know how His Excellency likes to speak from his own head, sir,' the cow said.

‘But apparently that head’s not working properly today, is it?! This can’t keep happening, Comrade. Somebody get him off the damn stand before he says things we’ll regret!’ A sheep and turkey promptly rose and scrambled for the podium. But the donkey, used to her husband’s speech gymnastics, was already manoeuvring him away.

COMRADE VICE PRESIDENT SPEAKS

Tuvius Delight Shasha was an old horse, though not as old as the Father of the Nation; in fact, some would insist that compared to His Excellency, tholukuthi he was a youngster. Strong and solid, he picked his way towards the stage with the lumbering movements of a hippo. He wore a red coat despite the boiling weather, decorated, like the rest of his attire, with prints of His Excellency’s face. At the podium, he stood and swished his tail and carefully considered the best way to pick up where his superior had left off.

Having to follow right after a speaker as natural and talented as the Old Horse, and while the smoke of his poetic eloquence was still wafting in the air, didn’t promise to make Tuvy’s job easy. But the vice president braved it. He reminded himself he’d fought and spilled real blood in Jidada’s Liberation War that was eventually won, a mere stage wasn’t going to bring him to his knees.

‘Forward with Jidada, Comrades!’ the vice president began, raising a hoof. He took care to speak in the self-deprecating tone he never failed to employ, especially in the presence of the First Femal.

‘Forward!’ the square rang.

As fitting of the occasion, and because the Party of Power had made it an important and ever relevant topic in Jidada, the vice president spoke of the Liberation War and thanked the War Veterans, yessir, the brave and

selfless animals who'd taken up arms to liberate the nation those many years ago, which of course couldn't be said of everyone in Jidada. He spoke of the peace and freedom enjoyed by all, and thanked the dogs of the nation for vigilantly maintaining that precious peace and freedom. And because he had no prepared speech and was generally nervous about speaking English without reading from a paper, he quickly wrapped up, aware, and quite rightly, that the crowds were uninspired by his delivery, that they were, even then, comparing him to the Father of the Nation.

THE LIVING ICON

'And lastly, we are here in Jidada as Jidada because of the leadership and wisdom and dedication of our one and only Founding Father, His Excellency, who was gifted to us by none other than God as the good Prophet said with his own mouth, who as you all know and must each one of you agree, has for close to four decades now, which is also close to half a century, ruled Jidada with a hoof of iron and a heart of love and brains of a thousand geniuses and the vision of God himself, our Liberator and Ruler who has shepherded us all with steadfastness and compassion and fearlessness and brilliance and justice and unwavering opposition to the Opposition, who, we must never, ever, ever forget, are indeed the shameful and criminal agents of regime change, along with their allies, the West. Our future is brighter than the brightest mortar fire, as well as secure because of our Founding Father's exemplary and visionary leadership and resistance, and we very much look forward to that future and we can't wait to get there. We thank him for dedicating his life to this great land, and we wish for him more years filled with all the blessings every day and any day. Onward with Jidada with a -da and another -da, Comrades! Thank you!'

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THOLUKUTHI NO SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE

Tuvy strutted back to his seat a happy horse, swishing his tail with the due pomposity of a hero who'd just saved the day. On his way he saluted His Excellency, who promptly turned away, but not fast enough for Tuvy to miss the look on the Old Horse's face. The confounded vice president dizzied at the pointed rebuff. Next to His Excellency, Dr Sweet Mother looked at him with a face like a baboon's behind, while a couple of seats from the donkey, General Judas Goodness Reza smiled sympathetically. And Tuvius, confused, wounded, sank to his seat. He ate his liver – and not for the first time – contemplating the mystifying rift between himself and the Father of the Nation, a rift that seemed to widen with each new encounter.

It would've been one thing had he just been dealing with the Old Horse alone – he'd been managing him all these years, dating back to the war days. But now, and to complicate matters, there was the damned donkey in the picture, a wild animal, a proper itchtail with no morals whatsoever, and of course, her little faction of minions, the pretentious and delusional so-called Future Circle, who fancied themselves the upcoming leaders of the Seat of Power, who thought their pointless pieces of paper from useless universities, along with far-fetched ramblings and outlandish ideas, counted as party credentials, which of course they didn't, and would never ever count in a million years. Because the Jidada Party wasn't just any other party; it was a Party of Power, a Revolutionary Party, and even the sticks and stones knew that the only credential that'd ever matter for and to the party was the gun. Not a stupid pen, not a useless book, not a miserable education certificate, not any high-sounding queer theories, none of it but the gun, and only the gun, and just the gun, and always the gun, and forever the gun, yessir, the gun, gun, gun, gun, gun. Tholukuthi the gun. And number two – the donkey and her useless followers hadn't fought in the Liberation War, hadn't in fact done anything for Jidada in the struggle,

not even serve the Liberators drinking water, and this made them nobodies, ciphers, absolute non-entities.

DO NOT SAY, 'I AM ONLY A CHILD.' FOR TO EVERYONE I SEND YOU, YOU MUST GO, AND ALL THAT I COMMAND YOU, YOU MUST SPEAK.

And now, Dr Sweet Mother took her place on the podium and stood looking into the throngs. Tuvy watched the donkey grab the mic as if she meant to chomp it with her pebble teeth, and imagined himself shoving it down her giraffe throat before giving her a kick to send her flying to the other end of the stadium.

'First of all I cannot, in all good conscience, stand here as a femal, and as your Mother, and as Dr Sweet Mother, and as a Christian, and not address the depravity we just saw from the so-called Sisters of the Disappeared on such a respectable occasion. There is of course the obvious issue of who really wants to see all those jiggly, ugly bodies with sagging teats and white and grey pubes in this broad daylight?!' the donkey began, punctuating her opening statement with uproarious laughter that was spontaneously picked up by the rest of the square, tholukuthi the sharp howls of mals rising the loudest.

'So I really must apologise to the Father of the Nation and all the Liberators, the mal elders, the honourable Prophet, our invited dignitaries and guests for what they had to unfortunately witness, though when you have plentiful democracy like we do here in Jidada, sometimes it happens that it gets to the heads of animals as you all saw. And to these pitiful so-called Sisters of the Disappeared, I would like to say, first of all, what wretched backsides did you come out of so that you have the morals of hyenas?! Don't you know we have innocent young ones in this audience?! What lesson are you trying to teach them?! If you have no interest in

respecting your bodies like the Father of the Nation said, then just go to a brothel and be proper itchtails and leave us alone!’ the donkey said, igniting a raucous round of mocking laughter. Tholukuthi the First Femal was getting into proper form; she knew her audience, and her audience knew her.

‘Now, and this is to be honest – you all know I’m all about telling it like it is. Surely isn’t this the kind of behaviour that is asking for rape, no?’ the donkey said. The audience went wild.

‘Just mark my words, Jidada, one day, without fail, these very Sisters of whatever will come crying that they’ve been raped during these naked parades. I tell you we’ll all be expected to show sympathy! And Al Jazeera and CNN and BBC and *The New York Times* and all these so-called rights organisations will be here crying foul! Just because a bunch of misguided femals forgot their place! Shame shame shame!’ the First Femal shrieked.

‘Shame! Shame! Shame!!!’ the square echoed back, as if this were a well-known slogan.

‘Shame indeed! But enough of the itchtails, they’re not who I stood up for. I have more pressing things on my mind today,’ the donkey said, clearing her throat and hinding to her full height, which was no small height, face no longer laughing.

The animals who knew Dr Sweet Mother well – and of course this was most of Jidada – read in that particular clearing of the throat that in fact had absolutely nothing to do with the throat needing to be cleared, and read in her face – now a mass of granite, and in that posture, tholukuthi legs braced wide, tail in the air, chest out and heaving, head high, read in that particular signature phrase, ‘I have more pressing things on my mind today’ – an unmistakable declaration of battle. Tholukuthi the donkey may not have fought in the famous and defining Liberation War, but the sticks and stones of Jidada would tell you that even with just her mouth

alone she could do serious battle and slay. The foremost question throughout the square then was, 'Who is getting slain today?'

The animals under the sun had calmly gathered themselves with the order and discipline of heads of cabbage. They delighted in the knowledge that they were too wretched, tholukuthi too beneath the donkey to be of any threat to her, yes, too insignificant to warrant her wrath; their role in this part of the programme was to be mere witnesses – all that was required of them was to serve as an accompanying choir to Dr Sweet Mother's laughter and jeers. The animals under the tent, however, and despite their Chosen status, had altogether different concerns – the donkey's mouth, besides the tendency to vomit instead of speak, had of late also become a deadly and unpredictable spear, tholukuthi it could be flung at any point, and there was no telling who it'd fall on and how. If it'd prick, if it'd stab, if it'd maim, if it'd annihilate.

'I never thought the day would come that I'd see and hear an animal dare stand in front of this whole gathering with the audacity of a scorpion on a testicle and eulogise His Excellency, while in actuality he harbours nothing but sheer ugliness, Tsk-tsk-tsk, you know!' the donkey snorted with typical haughtiness.

At that point she abruptly jerked her head up, stood stone still, fixed her gaze on the sun, and made a kind of twirling gesture with a hoof. Tholukuthi to everyone's utter, utter surprise, the sun did a bounce, then a brief jiggy, then finally stood at attention, upon which the fluffy clouds around it promptly scattered and disappeared. And then, it happened – the sun's rays turned a deep gold, visibly broadened, and spread far and wide in a dazzling display whose intensity made it necessary for each and every eye to squint. If it'd been hot before, Jidada Square now felt like the depths of hell, but the animals were too shocked, too confused to be bothered by the heat. They turned to look at one another with faces that asked one question,

‘How?’ and, unable to provide one another with any satisfactory answers, they turned back to look at Dr Sweet Mother as if they’d never seen her before.

The donkey was herself as shocked as her audience, but more than shocked, she was also thoroughly thrilled. She’d only tried the move on a whim, with no expectation whatsoever that she, Marvellous, daughter of Agnes, herself daughter of Chiriga, herself daughter of Tembewa, could command the sun, just like the Father of the Nation. And now, she revelled in the moment; giddy, jittery, so that it wasn’t really on her own accord that she circled the stand one time, circled the stand two times, circled the stand three–four times before she managed to finally get hold of herself. And when she opened her mouth to proceed, her voice, no doubt now empowered, came out charged with a lacerating tone.

‘So I have it on good intelligence that he, the animal I was telling you about, is here paying fake homage to His Excellency, when in reality he’s busy telling his minions that the Father of the Nation is now old, senile and unable to rule – those being his words and not mine – and busy plotting, planning for the day he’ll take over from our dear Ruler whom God himself chose in his infinite wisdom. I’m standing here to address this nonsense right here right now, with Jidada itself and this sun over there as my witnesses, and I’m saying: This is not an animal farm but Jidada with a -da and another -da! So my advice to you is, Stop it, and Stop it right now! Immediately! At once! And if you have any ears at all you’ll heed my advice because what you’re doing is swallowing all manner of big rocks, and very soon it shall be seen just how wide your asshole is when those very rocks will need to be shat,’ the donkey puffed. And, done with her warning, she stood and stared down her nose at the square, panting from talking without pause but triumphant. Above her, the sun outdid itself blazing like it’d never blazed before.