

## Chapter 29 – Frustration

When John ran into the camp, Comrade David, as usual, waited at the finish line. He noticed John's dirty condition, but that was common among the runners. Everybody came home muddy and wet.

'So, you fell today, Ingwe?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'You have been lucky so far, but it was inevitable the track would add you to its list of victims.'

'Yes, Sir. It was too slippery today in the wet.'

Simba waited for Takunda to arrive, but soon realised something was wrong. When he still hadn't appeared fifteen minutes later, he voiced his concern to a trainer, who reported it to Clarence.

No one had seen anything of Takunda since the start of the morning run, so the deputy commander set up search parties to look for him. Several groups of searchers walked along the track, looking for the missing man. They combed the forest on both sides of the track, peering into the thick foliage, while others searched the riverbank.

It was a slow, painstaking process when at mid-morning a party of searchers discovered a rock splashed with blood. 'Look!' said one. 'He must have slipped at the hairpin and fallen and hit this rock.'

'So where is he?' asked another. 'There're no footprints.'

And there was no sign of Takunda. The search party reported back to Clarence, who was quick to suggest a solution.

'He may have fallen and hit his head. If he was dazed, he might have stumbled and fallen into the river. Search downstream.'

'But, Sir, what about the crocodiles?'

'Well, hurry then, you fool. You lot need to find him fast if he's in the river. The rest of the search teams will continue searching the track in case he moved on along it.'

In the rainy season, the rivers raced towards the lower coastal strip, carrying fallen logs and drowned animals. There was little chance of anyone finding a human body in that torrent. With the heavy rains, the water flow would soon increase and swallow the sandy bank and rise to within half a metre of the running track. Again today, the smell of rain hung heavy in the air.

By early evening, it was clear the search for Takunda was fruitless. Everyone held a view of what may have happened to him. Simba's suspicion was by far the darkest, and he shared it only with Clarence.

'This is what we worried about, Sir. First Gondo, and now, Takunda. I don't have any proof, but I'm sure Ingwe is responsible. If I'm not careful, I'll be next. I must leave this camp.'

'Stay calm, Simba. I'll talk to Comrade David and see what we can do. I have plans for Comrade Ingwe, but for now I'll put them on hold. In the meantime, stay away from him.'

Later that evening, Clarence advised the group in John's tent they were leaving the next morning to join other groups on active operations. There was much excitement among John's comrades, but he wasn't included because he was a relative newcomer.

'Who will come into my tent, Sir?'

'We'll put new recruits in with you as they arrive. All you new ones will be together.'

'New! I've been here for months. I should leave with the comrades in my tent.'

'Your arrival was unexpected, so you're the odd man out. If you train with the new group, you'll leave with them when their training is done.'

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In the morning, John didn't see Simba at the run. Nor did he see him at the training. He spoke to a recruit from Simba's tent and didn't like the answer.

'Oh! Simba shipped out with a group of senior recruits first thing this morning. They've transferred him to Comrade Kutuyisa's camp.'

This wasn't good news for John. Not only was Clarence suggesting he'd join a group of raw recruits, which would lengthen his stay in the camp, but the reason for him being there no longer existed. He wasn't interested in being a guerilla and changing the government. The status quo suited him, and with Judge Barclay's help, he was doing just fine. Avenging Aneni was all that mattered, but now Simba was gone.

All day, John stewed over his situation. After the evening political orientation meeting, he returned to his empty tent and lay on his mat, pondering his predicament. Simba left for active operations with his tent mates. He should have gone with them, not Simba. He'd proven over and over he was at least equal to the more senior recruits, yet he'd soon be grouped with new recruits, classifying him as a junior.

John wasn't one to let things lie. He'd complain to David about being stuck in the camp longer than most. He got up and made his way across the clearing towards the commander's large tent. Halfway over, he bumped into Clarence.

'Ah! There you are, Ingwe! Comrade David wants to see you in his tent right away.'

'Yes, Sir.'

On most occasions, Clarence would escort any recruit visiting David's tent, hanging around to hear what was said. But this time, he walked on towards his office, leaving John standing there, wondering why he'd been summoned. He hurried on to David's tent and knocked on the wooden plaque with the words *Camp Commander* hanging by the entrance.

'Come,' David called.

'You wanted to see me, Sir?'

'Yes, Ingwe. Come in and sit down. Share a beer with me?'

David held up a large bottle of Manica beer.

'Thank you, Sir.'

David poured the beer into two glasses and handed one to John.

'How are you liking it here in the camp?'

'Well enough, Sir, but I was wondering when I'd go on active operations.'

'Don't be hasty, my friend. Most recruits stay here for six months before deployment. You will have soon completed six months, but I've been watching you. You are intelligent and capable. When Rhodesia is free, we'll need people like you in leadership positions. There's no point in you going out and getting yourself killed. We have plenty of combatants for that.'

‘But what can I do here?’

‘You can become a trainer. That is my plan for you. New recruits will arrive soon and join you in your tent. You’ll be the team leader of that group, and when they’re deployed, you’ll get another group.’

‘I was hoping to play an active part in liberating our country.’

‘Remember, if you take on senior roles here, you will also get senior roles in the new Zimbabwe.’ David opened another beer and poured John a glass.

Later, back in his tent, John felt buoyed and a little lightheaded. It was well past his bedtime, and he slumped onto his sleeping mat. It was the last thing he remembered before the early morning activity roused him.

Another thing he loved about the early morning runs was it gave him time to think. Exercise always made his brain more active. This morning was no different, with David’s words on his mind. David painted a compelling argument for him staying, but when he considered it, time in the camp was to be endured, not relished.

With the thoughts swirling in his head, John pushed himself harder than usual and led the runners back into camp. He’d not intended to be home first, but his mind was elsewhere. As usual, David watched the runners return and noted John’s sudden improvement.

‘I see the morning runs have improved your fitness, Ingwe. What a difference between your earlier runs and now. You are one of the best examples of how training can develop a person’s stamina.’

John realised he may have made a crucial error. He bent forward with his hands resting on his knees, gasping for air, and pretending to suffer from overexertion. While David appeared pleased with his effort, John noticed Clarence in the background, looking grim-faced.

Over the next few days, John continued to arrive back in camp amongst the leading runners, and thereafter, he came in well clear of the others. David and Clarence chatted about his progress.

‘Ingwe had shown wonderful improvement in his running, Clarence.’

‘Don’t you think it strange how he has improved so soon after Takunda’s disappearance?’

‘No, no! He improved after I told him he could become a trainer. A little encouragement can motivate a person. You should try it sometime, Clarence.’

‘What sort of trainer could he be? He hasn’t trained in China or Tanzania. The limited training we give here wouldn’t qualify him to train the comrades.’

‘From what we’ve seen of his running, he could make an ideal fitness trainer.’

When do you plan to make him a trainer?

‘When the new recruits arrive next month.’

‘The other trainers won’t like him being promoted so soon.’

‘That’s too bad! I decide who gets promoted here. To begin with, he’ll be a section commander leading the recruits in his tent, and if that works out, he might even become a platoon commander. Most of the trainers hold that rank, and they won’t feel threatened if, at first, he’s only a section commander.’

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When the new recruits arrived, John found they were a mixed bunch. A few were gung-ho types, raring to go, full of threatened aggression. Others were reticent, and he wondered if they were coerced to join. Still others were somewhere in the middle. One named Elijah

confessed to him he was only there because his parents demanded he join the struggle for independence.

The new recruits also filled the neighbouring tent, so David put John in charge of two sections. He wasn't yet a platoon commander, but he was on his way. Each morning, his teams were first up and ready to run. Not all were athletic, but he believed running motivated the eager and cleared the concerns of the reticent. His public-school education held him in good stead, giving him both social and leadership skills. Soon, his popularity amongst his men was clear to all.

Clarence resented John's promotion and took every opportunity with his closer trainers to hint at favouritism. One burly fellow took it upon himself to carry matters further. Each time he passed John at mealtime or political meetings, he made a point of bumping into his shoulder.

At first, John believed it was unintentional, but when he noticed some other trainers sniggering, he realised the man was trying to provoke him. The burly guerrilla was a trainer, and John wondered what would happen if he challenged him. Military discipline was not to be taken lightly, but he needed to do something.

After dinner one evening, when John was leaving the kitchen area to return to his tent, the burly fellow bumped into his shoulder harder than usual. In a flash, John stepped on his foot so he couldn't move back and slammed his fist into the man's nose. As his fist landed, he released the foot, and in his hurry to back off, the man crashed heavily onto the ground.

It happened so fast, nobody saw it, and the embarrassed man told his comrades he'd tripped. Everyone feared the public punishment handed out for insubordination or lack of discipline, so John prayed the matter would end there. It was unlike him to react without considering the consequences. Now, he'd have to wait to see what might happen next.

The morning after the incident, exciting news arrived at the camp. Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, and other non-exiled leaders signed an agreement at Government House in Salisbury, paving the way for an interim administration. An Executive Council made up of Muzorewa, Sithole, Chief Jeremiah Chirau, and the Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Smith, would lead the new government.

'Sellouts! They're all sellouts!' Clarence shouted. 'We won't accept that government.'

Many in the camp believed the dam wall of Rhodesian resistance was showing signs of cracking. It was the chief topic of the camp political meetings for the following two weeks.

For John, the main issue was whether the burly trainer would report their confrontation to Clarence. For several days, he waited for the axe to fall, though after the incident's fleeting moment, he experienced no further difficulty with any of the trainers or platoon commanders.

But he sensed the more David favoured him, and the more his popularity grew, the more resentful Clarence became. He wondered if Clarence waited for the right moment to act against him.