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# A Storm Blew in from Paradise

Translated from the Swedish by  
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‘Why did you come back?’

P has been sitting with his chin on his chest; he raises his eyes and looks across the table again. ‘I’ve already told you,’ he says. The room is windowless, and despite the fact that both men have unbuttoned several of their shirt buttons, they are sweating profusely; there are large wet spots on their backs and under their arms. The interrogator spreads out his fingers and drums his fingertips against each other. P looks down at the floor again. The concrete looks rough and desolate, like a photograph of the moon’s surface.

‘I was promised a job at a company outside Lusaka.’ P doesn’t understand why they’re holding him here, why they have brought him here at all. ‘I was going to fly a crop duster.’

‘You were going to fly a crop duster.’ The men are speaking Swahili with one another. The interrogator looks through the papers on the table. His body is wiry, his face is fleshy and his features crude, his moustache is sprinkled with grey, he is nearly bald. His facial expressions are amused, cruel, sometimes artificially friendly. ‘A Ugandan fighter pilot travels from Rome to Zambia to fly a crop duster over fruit plantations?’

P wipes the sweat from his brow. They brought him here straight from the airport, and he hasn’t had anything to eat or drink all day. He is tired; he has the sense of being caught in a dream that is far too long, of swimming underwater, of being outside himself. The walls of the room are blue. Tendrils of bare cement appear where the paint is flaking. They look like continents on a map from another time, another world.

‘Send me back to Rome if you don’t believe me.’

A guard is standing in the corner of the room to the left, behind P’s back; his presence makes itself known only by the scraping of shoes against the floor. The interrogator changes position, rests his chin in his hand, places an index finger over his lips in reflection. He refuses to believe that anyone would return to this devastated continent without aims beyond the one P has given time and again: that he wanted to fly, that his only chance to fly was at a small company outside Lusaka in Zambia that sprays fruit plantations using propeller planes from colonial times.

P screws up his eyes and feels the exhaustion rising in his head like a white roar. He feels ill.

‘It’s time you realize you won’t be allowed to return to your contact in Rome.’

‘My contact?’

The interrogator pounds the table with his hand. ‘Who sent you to Zambia? Who do you work for?’ The guard behind P moves; his shoes scrape against the floor. ‘Well. How could we send you back to Rome? Officially, you already went back there, from Lusaka, didn’t you? You signed the deportation order yourself? The bald Tanzanian points at a document, then takes out yet another piece of paper and places it on the table. ‘Right here, you signed a statement to attest that you have been sent back to Lusaka, from here.’

P stares straight ahead, trying to think of something to say. He hasn’t been beaten, but violence is hanging in the air.

‘You ought to be more careful about where you put your signature. You no longer exist. It’s time you start answering our questions.’

Many of the papers that have already been placed on the

table belong to P: his passport, his plane tickets. The interrogator takes yet another document out of a folder and looks at it, pretending to be considering something. He places it on the table and pushes it over to P, who picks it up.

P looks at the Greek letters. His name and rank. The insignia of the Hellenic Air Force: a man with wings, white against a sky-blue background. His diploma.

‘You were trained at the Hellenic Air Force Academy in Dhekelia outside of Athens; then you went to Rome, and from there to Zambia. Why?’

‘I wanted to fly.’ The statement sounds like a lie even to him. He wants to shout, to stand up and overturn the table, shout that he just wanted to fly. He feels the letters with his fingertips. He just wanted to fly. Inside him, a scrap of an image flutters by, a memory that feels like it took place in another life: he’s standing beside a chain-link fence, watching jet airplanes come sinking out of the sky; it’s his first autumn in Greece, and the leaves haven’t yet fallen but the crowns of the trees in the playground have turned a colour like cardboard; he and the rest of the future flight cadets from the Third World study Greek on narrow wooden benches, repeating verbs and nouns all day long, but one afternoon they are picked up by a bus and driven through the barriers around the air-force academy and dropped off at that chain-link fence that faces the airfield, and they stand there and look at the airplanes that they’re going to learn how to fly, later, after their language course is finished—the sleek murder machines move across the runway, far away, slow and wobbly like gulls.

‘Do you want a cigarette?’

P shrugs without looking up from the document in his hands. The interrogator must have given a signal to the guard,

because he takes a step forward and holds out a pack of unfiltered cigarettes. P takes one, sticks it in the corner of his mouth; the guard lights it and then backs into the shadows again. P puts down his diploma, waits for a question, or for violence, or for his release, for something; he smokes.

‘What is your opinion of Obote?’

‘Of Obote?’ He lets the smoke curl through his nostrils. ‘I wish he were president of Uganda. He is one of my people.’

‘Tell me what happened when Obote visited your village in the spring of ’69.’

‘I was in Greece in ’69.’ P knows what the interrogator is talking about. John wrote about it in a letter.

‘The spring of 1969.’ The man pronounces the year slowly, syllable by syllable, as though there were a chance that P might have misunderstood it. ‘In the spring of 1969, Milton Obote, your president, travelled around and gave speeches in the countryside. It was a campaign to unite the people after the Buganda kingdom uprising. You are familiar with this?’

‘I was in Greece.’

‘When he came to your village, he was attacked by a mob that tore down the podium, destroyed the microphone, and forced him to flee.’

‘I was in Greece.’

‘But you heard the news from your family, didn’t you? You were all against Obote.’ The interrogator points at P as he says this, as though P were the one behind the general disapproval of Obote’s tendency to favour his own family, his own ethnic group, from the presidential palace. P snorts, ashes onto the floor, shakes his head.

‘My life was destroyed by the military coup.’ He waits for a question that doesn’t come; he tries to remember what he has

said and what he hasn't said, which lies, which omissions, and which confessions measure out the bounds of this conversation. The three men are silent; only their breathing is audible, and the dull hum of a ventilation duct, and far off, outside the room, the occasional sound of footsteps. The interrogator takes a photo album from a box on the floor. P recognizes it; like the documents on the table they have taken it from his luggage.

In 1969 he was in Greece, flying the training planes. In 1967 he was in Greece, studying Greek and watching the training planes land and take off, and in the evenings came a chill that he had never experienced in Uganda and that made him sleep with his olive-green training jacket pulled tighter around his body, made him shiver, and some days a breeze came from the sea and brought with it enormous amounts of sand that blew in over the narrow streets of Dhekelia, sand white as pearly shards, or white as broken bits of sky, sand that lay in thick dunes along the edges of sidewalks and the sides of houses. He went to the sea sometimes, on the weekends, on a civilian bus line that carried tourists in the summer but was nearly empty in the fall, winter, and spring. He wandered alone in the swell with his shoes in his hand and his pants rolled up and felt how something from his childhood, some vague thing, was swallowed by darkness, and maybe by forgiveness. He sometimes thought, then, by the sea, that the people who existed at that time would one day disappear, become limestone on the bottom of another sea.

The interrogator takes a photograph out of one of the plastic sleeves and pushes it across the table. A young African man in a pilot uniform stands on a T-37, supported by the large, grey tail fin, almost twice as tall as a person.

‘This is you.’

‘No,’ he says quickly, without knowing why he is lying.

‘It’s not you?’

The photo is grainy and the face in the picture is shadowed by the pilot’s helmet, blurry. It could be someone else. The situation between Tanzania and Uganda is very tense. Uganda’s military is shooting grenades across the border. Amin claims that Ugandan guerrilla soldiers who want to overthrow his regime have camps in Tanzania.

‘It’s someone else.’ He shouldn’t have lied, but he did and now he has to stick to his lie. He bends down and stubs out his cigarette under his shoe. There are already two butts on the floor from cigarettes he smoked earlier. How long has he been sitting here? ‘It’s one of my classmates.’

‘You persist in lying.’ The interrogator shakes his head, makes a disappointed face, folds his hands over his stomach, and leans back in his chair. ‘It’s not important. We’ll start over from the beginning. The man in the photograph is you. You belonged to the second generation of Ugandan fighter pilots. You were sent to the Hellenic Air Force Academy in Dhekelia outside of Athens, which has produced fighter pilots for a number of African countries since the early sixties.’

The first time they went through this, P refused to confirm any of what the Tanzanians said, but the irrational loyalty he felt toward the two states that have now completely betrayed him disappeared as his exhaustion grew. He closes his eyes and nods slowly; yes, he was sent to Greece to be trained as a fighter pilot and an officer in the Ugandan air force. He sits with his chin lowered, his eyes closed.

He remembers the increasingly chilly autumn days and the shouts in Arabic and French and the crowds in the corridors



when they all rushed out to the yard, all at the same time to shove each other and brag about the military education in their countries and the planes they'd already flown during the trials. He remembers the days. He particularly remembers the day when they took the bus to the airfield and stood staring through the fence, how their eyes widened when the afterburners on a T-37 lit and comet tails of welding-flame blue slowly grew out of the jet exhaust, and how the plane jerked and hurled away and up, and that in that moment it felt like it was possible to start over, to leave your past behind, to escape. As though history didn't exist.

Uganda had recently become independent from British rule, and they had started to build up the nation's air force by buying MiG-21s from Israel. A first generation of Ugandan pilots had been trained to fly these by Israeli security advisors, but while the Israelis continued to train Ugandan pilots, they began to send small groups of young men to the Hellenic Air Force Academy in Greece. The idea was that they would become familiar with American and French fighter planes and, above all, become officers drilled in the military lifestyle, gentlemen, leaders. While the Ugandan pilots who were educated in their native country only trained for a little more than six months, those who went to Greece would study at the air force academy for three years in order to become the corps and spearhead of the new air force.

They slept in bunk beds and kept their few belongings in grey metal lockers; they were the most promising members of their generation, their country's future gods of the sky. As they walked from the student quarters to the language-school building, cawing birds ate from garbage cans. P was in a class that was mostly made up of Libyans, Egyptians, and Tuni-

sians, but also students from the Ivory Coast and a young man from Chad.

He received letters from John, his eldest brother; he read them sitting on his bed. He longed for the language course to be over so he could begin his military training and then learn to fly. He jogged in the afternoons, felt his heart beating and his lungs expanding, contracting, expanding; he went to the sea, he bent down and washed his face in the water that tasted of salt, not sweet like the water on the shores of Lake Victoria. Not like home.

On the day when they stood at the fence with their eyes open so wide that the whole sky would fit in them, the sky that would soon be theirs, the sound of the airplanes' motors were like thunder and when the planes descended they had rated the landings, given their future colleagues two points out of ten, or three points, or sometimes one point, and of course one of them would yell zero then, to be the worst: in Greek, *zero*. They had boxed with each other and laughed. That was in the beginning. When he was a child he had wanted to be a bird.

'What did you say?'

The interrogator said something that P didn't hear. P is sitting with his head in his hand, his elbow on the table. His eyes are still closed. Inside him, the image and the sound of hundreds of hovering birds.

'I said that I'm quoting one of the air force academy's own documents.' The interrogator has another piece of paper in his hand; he folds it, unfolds it, reads: "Ever since airplanes were first used in military operations in 1912, the Air Force has protected the skies of our country against every threat, and it is with deep respect that we turn to the victims and the