

ANC' ITHI AZIKWELWA. Danger lurks for he that betrays the democratic call, dare be the traitor then you'll swallow dirt.

The message then is that we do not only need this medium but the mass upsurge at home is throwing it at us. Our political organiser must purposely initiate it, then grandmothers shall on their own feel compelled to crouch towards the wall with a spray or paint brush in hand. Like the equally sad neglect accorded the leaflet bomb, the wall slogan can no longer be neglected. We

need special teams for wall propaganda. The angelic walls of Lower Houghton, and Libertas, the walls surrounding the soldiers' barracks, the bus shelter at Winterveldt, the door of a public place, wherever the surface is smooth and paint can stick we must foster defiance. We have a lesson to learn from the MPLA and the multi-columns of wall slogans in all its towns. And when walls begin to spit cold comfort for the enemy it shall be our political propagandist that shall have laid another brick for the king size collapse of the tyrant.



**THE REAL LIFE
OF
DOMINGOS XAVIER**
José Luandino Vieira
A novel of Angola

CHAPTER 9

»A dance is a dance, mano! Who told you there wasn't one? Who?... Good heavens, that bloke's a copper's nark. If I meet him I'll break his head, I swear! Heavens, with me? He couldn't! He knows I can be dangerous. No, it's not that, mano. Now I'm using my head to think. That's why the bloke's afraid. . . Eh! No, not like that. So you thought it was just a wrestling match that I was up to? Forget it, mano. Now.. now when I pick up a pen no one can touch me, no one, mano. You won't miss it, Chico, you won't miss it, will you? You won't miss it, John, and you too, Teteco. Why? Just listen to him! You've got a dance with the Ngola group, with all our friends there, with our dishes and our songs, and you ask why?

Leave off, just come, don't forget. And you, bring your girls!... don't miss it!»
 «Eh, don't say that, Cilla! You can't see how my heart aches! Hum, what's this? That's just lies, it can't be right! I bet it was Fefa who told you... So I guessed right... Leave off, Marcelina, the girl's jealous! We're going, aren't we? Goodness, with the Ngola coming, you say perhaps? You're an ungrateful girl! All right, mana, I know, Ngola without Liceu and without Amorim isn't the same. But just think about Johnny Maria; when he play "Hearts" he'll make you cry, Mm? You're going to see fontinhas...? I'm not happy about that, mana, I'm not happy... Cilla, you won't forget: my heart aches for you...»

IN ALL TOWNSHIPS

«It was he who told me to tell you. Yes, it seems we're having a meeting. All right! Don't miss it, they'll all be there. And look, bring that sister of yours as a cover and have a spin. A dance is a dance!»

On that Saturday the dance in Bairro Operario was talked of in all the townships and in all the corners of the city where the people go to meet and gossip. True, it was not known to everybody. One had to be careful, when jeeps were patrolling the huts, trying to stamp out the people's stubborn joy. The dance in Mussunda's house was publicized to acquaintances and friends, the ones who had to be there, and a dance there was really something. It meant: Angolan music, Angolan food, everything! It meant Brazilian music and Cuban as well, the people, music of Bahia and merengue! And none of that canned music from the radio, not that. A live group, the people's group, like the Ngola, on this night.

All morning and afternoon, mothers and daughters were preparing special dishes to take to the dance, the spiced groundnut paste was taking on a golden tinge and banana leaves concealed well-prepared cassava. Early in the morning the children went to the market to fetch cola-nut and ginger, to make a tasty mixture to go with the drinks. Other women prepared some good fish and did not forget the well-tryed sauce, a soup to revitalize the dancers when dawn was coming near.

Half-past seven, the children were already rushing to pick up soft drinks and bottles of wine, ale and maize beer to put them ready in tubs of ice. Mothers, plump or dry with years, were setting out the dishes, blowing on the old masse-mba, complaining that the youth of today did not want to know about the old-time dances: they just want cha cha, they just want merengue. From Prenda, lost there behind the city, from Boavista, from all the townships, in small groups began to pour in lads and lasses.

The artists from the group were brought in a van by a friend who dropped them and went on. They tuned their guitars and banged the drums, and Chico came and performed miracles on the gourd xylophone «Just to tease them», as he put it.

The dance promised well. There had not been a dance like this for a long time, ever since they stopped them at Botafogo. Children came to stare through the yard's boundary fence, now strengthened with reed mats, and then they ran off to whisper in the ears of their mothers and big sisters.

But the ball had been an effort to arrange. There had been arguments. All one night had been spent in a discussion about the dance. Mussunda spoke up for the celebration, but there were some companheiros, especially those who had relatives in prison, who did not want it and would not agree.

»No, mano. With Mr Florian, and Zeca and so many in prison, you are going to have a celebration? Heavens, no! You think the people's life is for pleasure, is that it?»

Mussunda cooled the discussion down and with his recognized skill tried to mediate:

»Think of this! Our brothers are in prison, that's true. But we go on living and struggling?»

»That's true, we do go on.»

»Right. So do you want the political police to think that you are dead? that you don't move?»

»It's not that, Mussunda, but.....»

The discussion became heated, some were supporting the proposal for a dance, as the expression of the people's vitality and enjoyment of life, which could not be suppressed even with the arrests of sons, brothers and friends. One could even say, argued Mussunda, that our brothers are worthy of this happiness. In the prison, they conduct themselves like true men. They need to know that we do not forget them, and this is our homage to the steadfastness of our beloved brothers.

The discussion was renewed, and someone suggested a demonstration by the wearing of mourning or in some other way, but the proposal for a dance was gaining ground, and everyone began to accept the tailor's point of view. Then, the Ngola playing did the trick. Hell, yes! Every tune, one of ours, the people's!

Late that night the dance was agreed upon and preparations began for Saturday. The only worry now was rain, but as all day it had been fine this thought was put aside. So with much happiness everything was ready.

Half-past nine, the dance already promised well. Some couples were dancing, but the group had not yet warmed up. Women were chatting quietly in the corners and township »swingers» were comparing their trousers or talking about the »chicks». Mussunda went from one side to the other, always in a rush but speaking to everyone, as much to the studious youth as to the »swinging», and always with the right word, apt in every case, which brought all the people on his side. When he went out, comments were passed:

»It's the truth, mano. That Mr Mussunda is one of the good ones. People can trust him.»

»Heavens! I don't know anyone else like him.»

But when Miguel arrived much later with his sister Bebiana, Mussunda left the group of Botafogo's Organizers (Chico Kafundanga gazed lovingly at Bebiana) and went to meet his friend with a broad smile and a hug. He took him aside to a cassava plant. Bebiana began talking to Chico and then he went to dance, whispering words of love to the girls or swapping jokes with each other. The group was great: Fontinhas sang and Johnny Maria, on a guitar, had begun to do his tricks with the instrument, and everyone clapped. Then everyone talked and laughed together when the musicians went inside to drink wine with lemonade, maize beer or ale as they pleased.

Mussunda held Miguel's arm and under the cassava plant listened to his friend's story of the journey to the dam. Miguel told it with all details - how he had not met anybody, what he had learned about the prisoner, and (even more softly, still with the surprise in his voice) of the afternoon which had taught him so much.

Mussunda smiled and listened with satisfaction.

»Good heavens, mano, How could I have guessed? You told me just to look

for him, if I hadn't found anyone else! I searched, but nothing! Not even at his mother's! I had lunch with her and then went to ask for the name which you gave me. Lawks! When they took me to speak to him, I was on the point of apologizing and going away. I thought: Mussunda has made a mistake, or perhaps there are two people of that name here on the site.

Mussunda went on smiling, nodded in greeting to friends as they arrived, but listened all the time to the story.

»It's true, mano! Yes, sir: the engineer told me to look for him at his house at six o'clock. He pointed out where it was and just as I was going, with my head still in a flat spin, he said in a loud voice for the draughtsman to hear: »Perhaps I can find you a job. Come and see me at home!«

The dance around them grew more lively. Couples were swaying to the rhythm and the group was making the air shake with their songs. Johnny Maria was wreaking havoc with his guitar, a pity the lad on the drums was not Amorim, that mulatto, heaves he was the greatest.

»Go on with the story mano, tell it all.«

»So. At six o'clock I was there and when I knocked it was the lady who answered. A young lady, like a child still. She asked me in and I sat down. Gracious, Silvester had a lot of books. Then he came, talked to me, asked about you and took me to the garage. Right there I found the lad. He even had a bed and food and everything. . . .«

The rhythm of the dance increased, the small yard was packed and the dancers' feet raised a fine red dust which stuck fast to the shoes. In the kitchen the bustle increased, and the ice tubs were constantly refilled with bottles. Fontinhas is singing »Hearts«, the group's star number. Mussunda interrupts his friend to say:

»Miguel, when I begin to hear »Hearts« I still think of mano Liceu ...«

»Leave it! He will one day sing »hearts« again for all of us.«

Mussunda does not answer, thinking of all the brothers in prison and their example to all those outside. He was pleased that he had won over the dance. They deserved their courage to be celebrated. In the excitement of the dance, no one noticed that there came in by the back door a thin, dry lad bringing a white man in glasses with thick lenses. Only Mussunda spots them at last and rushes up to them.

»Sousa, you finally got here! Ooooh, mano! Are you all right, are you all right? Silvester, how are you?«

»Well, Mussunda, and you?«

»I don't need to tell you, just look with your own eyes. So, engineer, a drink ...«

The engineer accepted and looked over at the celebration. At the back several girls were close to Chico John. There was no doubt, that lad was extraordinary. Now Bebiania was with him, very proud to be the one he chose when all her girlfriends wanted to be out on the dance floor following Chico's crazy steps - he was a star dancer and a star footballer. Irene broke shyly away from the group and came over with a smile to greet Mussunda. The engineer went off with Mussunda, who checks the kitchen and goes round to taste the sweet dishes as he likes to do. Outside Souisinha and Irene began to talk of things which they had not been able to talk of for a long time.

The night moved on towards Sunday, couples were tracing on the red soil all the caprices of the Angolan rhythm. Johnny Maria, Fontinhas and Tony are

kings of the dance. When the number ends, amid a burst of applause, Johnny Maria picks up his guitar and, wiping away his sweat with a handkerchief, says to the dancers:

«Friends! To give due honour to this dance to which you have invited our group, we want now to play for you...and for all of them...you understand...the samba composed by our brother, the founder of the group: Carlos Aniceto...»

The clapping of hands drowned Johnny Maria's closing words. Mussunda, Silvester, Sousinha, Miguel, Chico and Irene did not hear the end, and all that reached the room where they were meeting was the loud applause of the dancers who were enjoying themselves.

The song began to the slow rhythm of the drum, accompanied by the gourd xylophone. Johnny Maria joined in fingering the guitar strings. And no one danced when Fontinhas in his sorrowing voice began to sing:

This world seems determined
to drive me from sight.
I don't know the reason -
a caprice or a spite.
I can't find the reason -
if the world could explain -
I'd seek a respite.

From the silence which fell arose a curious expectancy. Hanging on Fontinhas lips, the young men and women came and stared. The wind came, but slowly, to rustle in the leaves of the cassava plants. While Johnny Maria played his guitar, Fontinhas was far away:

Was there some secret
which cruel fate
wouldn't bring to light?
What could be the secret
to find me captive
without making a fight?

The memory of Mr Liceu, held prisoner for so long without anyone knowing when he would be freed, ran through the silent couples on the open square. The soft voice of Mano Liceu, the rascally skill at singing of Liceu, that guitar of Liceu's . . . Oh, when, when are we going to hear them? One day surely....

This oppression's
built around me
the cruellest plight.
Though I'm worried
I am certain
I'm not lost in the night.

True, mano Liceu, true. You are not lost, we are all with you in your prison. Fontinhas sings your song, Ngola play your compositions, the people do not forget, mano Liceu.

The rythm goes on. Fontinhas was silent, but the young men and women are now singing the chorus. Then everyone began to dance again.

Within the room, Mussunda and his friends hear Fontinhas's voice, the song and the silence which came when he sang. Silvester listened closely, while Mussunda smiled, smiled in contentment. Then they went on again with the

discussion - the dance was continuing - until someone knocked on the door to the room.

»Who is it?»

»Someone is looking for Mr Chico, Chico Kafundanga.»

»Who is it?»

»It's an old man and a child.»

Chico John got up, opened the door and slipped through the middle of the dancers, giving a gentle push to the left and right. Outside in the dark of a night broken only by a pale moon, old Petelo, with Zito holding his hand, was waiting. Chico drew them into a corner as Petelo began saying:

»We looked for you before dinner, no good! We looked for you after dinner, no good! They've only just told us that you were at this dance.»

»But tell then, tell: You have some news?»

Ooh, mano, very bad news...»

And moving his toothless jaws close to Chico's ear, he whispered about the trouble in the afternoon, the woman leaving the prison, and everything he had managed to find out from the women and men who had talked to the unfortunate girl. Then he went on to complain, now that he found mano Chico, how long he had been looking.

Chico John took old Petelo by the arm and led him, with his grandson, into the yard where the dance was. He gave some cake to the child and drink to the grandfather. Then he walked away slowly and went into the room where they were meeting.

The couples stopped dancing when they saw Petelo and the child, and Chico, looking very thoughtful, crossing the yard, and then Mussunda coming out more grim-faced than they had ever seen him, followed by Irene, Sousinha and a white lad. The xylophone and the drum were silent. Johnny Maria put down his mute guitar. Mussunda came well forward to the centre of the yard, wiped his face on his shirt-sleeve, and began to speak in a calm, solemn voice:

»My fellow Africans.....»

All eyes were trained on Mr Mussunda, waiting for his words, for they knew that something tragic had happened. The tailor looked around at drawn or still smiling, expectant faces, and when he saw Silvester behind the musicians' stand, he began again:

»My fellow Angolans. A brother has come to say that they have killed our comrade. He was called Domingos Xavier and he was a tractor driver. He never harmed anyone, only wanted the good of his people and of his land. I stopped this dance only to say this, not for it to end, for our joy is great: our brother carried himself like a man, he did not tell the secrets of his people, he did not sell himself. We are not going to weep any more for his death because, Domingos Antonio Xavier, you begin today your real life in the hearts of the Angolan people.....»

And not even the wind dared to rustle the leaves of the fig trees when Mussunda the tailor spoke thus.

CHATER TEN

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