

I

Thunder Is Not Yet Rain

A wilderness where a big tusker might seek refuge.

The savannah. Full moon.

MLIMA, *an elephant sensing danger, calls out to his fellow travelers.*

MLIMA (*with intensity and urgency*). When I was young I was taught by my grandmother to listen to the night. Really listen... for the rains in the distance... listen to the rustling of the brush... for the cries of friend or foe. She'd say you must listen with your entire body, feel how the earth shifts when there's the slightest disruption, because how you listen can mean the difference between life and death. It's the truth of the savannah, something we all learn at a very young age. Sacred words passed from generation to generation like stories of the verdant time before the violent crackle, before the drought and the madness... A time of plenty, when the plains and rivers were owned by all, a time recalled by my grandmother with such alacrity that one needn't be nostalgic. She'd say if you really listen, our entire history is on the wind.

He listens and feels the night with his entire body, feet, ears, nose. Movement.

Slowly, the layers of sounds of the savannah fill the space.

The crickets, the orchestra of wild animals, cowbells, whistles, and the faraway voices of the Maasai.

Even now, I hear the remnants of stories told by Long Ears, the elder, who knew where to find the sweetest acacia trees or the cool dark mud that was said to keep him ageless. When pushed he'd tell of how, once, he roamed so far across the land that it took him one year to find his way back home through the thorny thicket.

He returned with stories of rivers so wide they couldn't be crossed, trees so tall they did battle with the sky, and a sea of bobbing beasts and men. He'd walked across a world with no fences, no roads or resistance. We listened, though no one here believed such a far-fetched tale.

Listens. Enjoying.

I can hear the remnants of laughter, happiness that comes with the rains and reunions around the watering holes. Each hole a memory, a meeting, a sweet encounter, a fight and a friendship.

I hear my dear mother calling me handsome, but it was a *warning* that I'd come to understand as my tusks grew longer and more perfect than my brothers and sisters. I hear the first thunder that awakened me to fear. My first sneeze that accompanied the acrid stench of men. I hear the angry words exchanged before fighting Koko Mkimbiaji, we fought until we grew so tired that our only recourse was to become good friends. He made me laugh harder than any creature, even that gossipy egret who for a season clung to my back like a blemish.

He listens with his body.

Still now, I hear Koko Mkimbiaji wailing as his mother and sister died at the end of a poison spear, and anger became his guiding spirit. It took a year of wandering to calm him.

And I hear the song of beautiful Mumbi by the deep river, Mumbi elegant and quiet, brown liquid eyes. I chased her smell for a week, before she succumbed to my charm. Mumbi. Mumbi. Mumbi. I was not prepared for the first time we rubbed bodies, touched and committed. If you're listening, I could tell you of all the wounds I've endured for love.

Milima is killed by poachers. A press release is given

VI

A Word Is Like the Delta, It Stretches in Every Direction

Press conference. The reporters, GUOXI and PATIENCE, ask questions. Camera lights.

GUOXI (*aggressively*). I'm curious, how is it possible that Kenya's most famous elephant could be slaughtered beneath the noses of an army of KWS rangers?

ANDREW. As I already said, we've arrested two poachers in connection with the killing of Mlima. My men should be commended for how swiftly they apprehended the culprits. I'd like to recognize the quick work of Warden Wamwara Machau. It's now up to our government to ensure that the poachers are brought to justice, and that the criminal syndicates that fund them are targeted and shut down. Our duty is to protect wildlife. We're conservationists. Our reach doesn't extend into the government buildings, markets and homes of people responsible for driving the demand.

PATIENCE. Are you certain that these are the men responsible?

ANDREW.... That is a complicated question. Did they kill Mlima, yes, are they solely responsible... no.

PATIENCE. You keep evading questions! Why has it been so easy for poachers to track and kill elephants in your park?

ANDREW (*flustered – snaps*). It's not easy. They're experts. They are determined, and in some cases desperate. Some of them have equipment that surpasses our own. They strike at night, when elephants like to travel, and we don't have the resources to track all of the animals in every park. Poachers

are clever, believe it or not, they're even using social media, tourist photos to locate elephants.

One last question!

MLIMA *climbs onto ANDREW's shoulders*. ANDREW *feels the weight*.

GUOXI. Are you overstating perhaps to hide the fact that your agency has not done enough? It is easy to place blame elsewhere?

ANDREW. Again, who are you?

GUOXI. Fu Guoxi, information and public affairs, Chinese Embassy.

As ANDREW speaks we begin to hear cocktail chatter, traditional Chinese music.

ANDREW. To stop ivory trafficking will require all of the security agencies to collaborate, and that has proven very difficult. We – and I speak of all of us – must eliminate the corruption that allows this to continue in our country. It is a matter of national pride! Africans don't buy ivory.

A Boat is found to transport the ivory:

IX

The Best Way to Eat an Elephant in Your Path Is to Cut Him into Little Pieces

Mombasa port. A ship.

A haughty American, CAPTAIN RAMAAKER, oversees the loading of cargo crates.

CAPTAIN RAMAAKER. No. No. NO! I'm running clean now. After what happened last week, I'm not taking any more chances. The police are all over the docks. Never seen it like this.

AZIZ MUHAMMED. Ramaaker, don't make this a big deal. I'll provide you with the appropriate permits and paperwork on this side. Don Loc Enterprises will have the necessary papers in Vietnam. It will run absolutely smoothly. I promise. So don't get bent out of shape. As far as you know it's just timber, same as always, but I need someone I can rely on.

CAPTAIN RAMAAKER. They're cracking down. We stop in Muscat, Port Klang, before Hai Phong. I could do real time for this.

AZIZ MUHAMMED. Don't worry, you have an American flag. They will look past you. Relax. Trust me. I have a dhow that will meet you offshore, just beyond the reach of the Kenyan authorities. It's just timber, that's all you need to know.

The artist:

XIII

Rain Beats a Leopard's Skin, But Does Not Wash Out Its Spots

Ivory factory.

MLIMA stands in the middle of the stage. MASTER YEE walks around him, examines him, strokes him, taps him, and finally examines him with a magnifying glass. THUY FAN watches.

MASTER YEE. I'm speechless. Honored that you've entrusted me with these magnificent tusks.

THUY FAN. I wanted you to see them in person, because I knew you wouldn't believe me.

Milima's Tale Lynn Nottage

MASTER YEE. Magnificent.

THUY FAN. What do you think?

MASTER YEE. My goodness –

THUY FAN. I feel the same way. Extraordinary.

MASTER YEE. This will be no easy task.

MASTER YEE *runs his hands up and down* MLIMA. *It is sensual, intimate.*

I have too many thoughts. I haven't seen a pair of tusks like this in many many years. Not since I was a young man. Where... where did you find them?

THUY FAN. Rescued from the hands of a lesser craftsman who would have chipped away at its beauty. I felt there was only one man worthy of its grandeur.

MASTER YEE (*to MLIMA*). What should I do with you?

THUY FAN. You're the artist. You tell me.

MASTER YEE. I feel the tusks should be in conversation.

Masculine and feminine. In a pair like this there is always one that is dominant, larger. Come look. A strong bull gave us these. Solid, gorgeous color. Smooth, and surprisingly unblemished. You see the rings, you can almost determine his age. About fifty years old. A savannah elephant, no doubt. Rare. Very rare. Most of the big tuskers are long gone. Extraordinary. I feel that something singular can be made from them.

THUY FAN. I am pleased to hear that.

MASTER YEE. Is there anything that I need to know before I begin?

THUY FAN. Why? Is there something wrong?

MASTER YEE. I'm cautious these days, the ban has made it hard to focus on my craft. Suddenly, I feel like a criminal for doing what I have always done.

THUY FAN. The officials don't know any better. I wouldn't worry.

XV

A Man's Greed Is Like a Snake that Wants to Swallow an Elephant

Penthouse apartment. A party. Ambient chatter in the distance.

Two hip, young men admire the view of the city. Colorful lights fill the landscape.

HONG FENG. I've heard rumors.

LI JUN. Rumors? Hardly rumors.

HONG FENG. Then it's true?

LI JUN. You didn't hear it from me.

HONG FENG. I find it hard to believe? Five years ago he was begging for start-up money, and now –

LI JUN. And can we talk about this view?

A moment. Agog.

HONG FENG. I think this is about as high up as I can stand.

LI JUN. Yes, well, each year they build higher, as if they're trying to convene with the gods.

A moment.

HONG FENG. Hey man, have you seen the carvings?

LI JUN. Not yet. It's all anyone is talking about at the office. Nearly seven million yuan for the pair.

HONG FENG. Shit, no.

LI JUN. Yes.

HONG FENG. Really?

LI JUN. Yes.

HONG FENG. You know they couldn't be outdone by Jinjing Jin.

LI JUN. What do you think?

HONG FENG. I don't know, man, I'm a vegan. I gave up meat a couple of years ago and it doesn't sit right.

LI JUN. Hmm, yeah.

HONG FENG. And, the price is obscene.

LI JUN. But it's barely a ripple in his fortune. People like them –

ALICE, with cellphone, enters. Air kisses.

ALICE. Can I ask you to come inside?

HONG FENG. Yes.

ALICE disappears inside.

Shall we go in?

Inside.

ALICE. We are so pleased to welcome you to our new flat. This space would not feel like home until we invited our friends inside. So thank you. To mark this auspicious occasion we wanted to share something very special.

ALICE unveils MLIMA. Gasps. Polite applause.

Lights fade on all, but MLIMA, on display.

A long protracted moment. We contemplate MLIMA.

Sounds of the savannah intrude.