

The man who thought he was steering the forest

In the capital, where ambition grows like weeds in cracked marble, there once arrived a politician who believed politics was a chessboard and not a swamp.

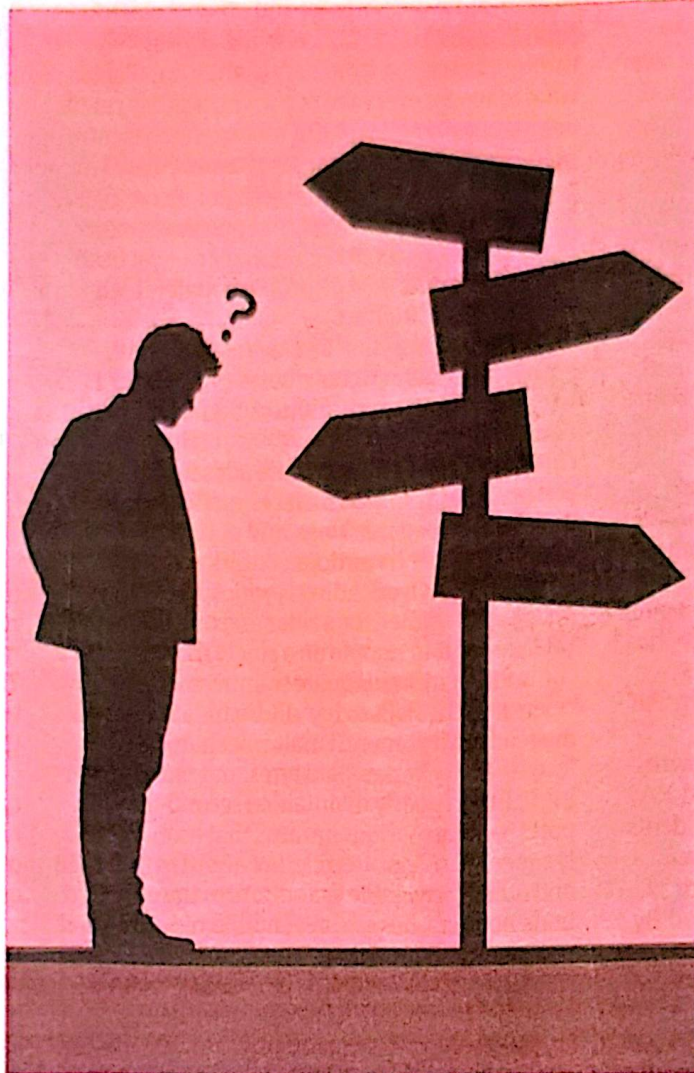
He came from a long-established Opposition party built on history and tradition, one that carried its past influence as part of its identity. He entered into an alliance with the ruling party with the confidence of a man joining a river midstream, convinced he could shape its direction simply by swimming harder than everyone else.

To him, politics was brokerage. A marketplace of favours. He imagined himself as the clever merchant who would buy loyalty cheaply, sell it dearly, and walk away with the capital of kings. What he did not understand was that the ruling party did not operate like a market. It operated like a forest that had long forgotten it was ever a garden.

In this forest, alliances were not contracts; they were bait. Handshakes were not agreements; they were hooks dressed in velvet gloves. And those who entered believing they were hunters often discovered, too late, that they had been gently assigned the role of prey that could still speak.

He mistook observation for admiration. "I am one of them," he would often say. The ruling party never confirmed or denied this. They simply smiled the way a forest does when a deer announces it is part wolf because it once slept near wolves.

He quickly established himself within the alliance as a loud branch. He interrupted elders in meetings, rewrote speech-



es already carved into stone, and declared himself a "necessary modernisation force" in a system that had long stopped believing in necessity. He was bossy in the way only the newly included can be, mistaking permission for authority, proximity for ownership.

Within their structure, he was categorised not as an equal partner but as a particularly energetic bird that had flown into a large, well-organised cage and mistaken the bars for decorative architecture. He believed he was climbing. They understood he was pacing.

At times, he even attempted to outshine the very figures who had invited him in. He would suggest "innovations" that were simply louder versions of existing plans. He would criticise decisions already finalised and present them as insights. He would enter rooms that had already finished their conversations and speak as if the silence were waiting for him.

Meanwhile, the ruling party observed him with the patience of an organism that has no need to hurry. They were not interested in his rebellion because they had not yet decided what shape

his usefulness would take.

To them, he was not a rival lion, as he imagined. He was a mirror placed in a corridor, reflecting movement without participating in it. And like all mirrors in that corridor, he began to mistake reflection for authority.

He often boasted privately that he would "use them at the final stage," as though final stages were scheduled events rather than outcomes decided elsewhere and spoke of turning the alliance into his stepping stone, of outmanoeuvring those he believed were equally hungry for power. He never understood that hunger was not their weakness. It was their language.

The ruling party was often described by outsiders as an animal that devours its own offspring. Every step the politician took was noted, not with alarm but with calm interest.

He believed he was surrounded by fools he could eventually outplay. In reality, he was surrounded by patience that had outlived many smarter men.

Still, he marched through the corridors of power like a man rehearsing a coronation no one else had agreed to attend. He mistook silence for ignorance, and above all, he mistook inclusion for belonging.

In the capital's machinery of influence, there is a quiet saying spoken only behind closed doors: those who think they are steering it are often only shifting their seat as it moves.

The politician had not yet understood this, but the machine had already understood him entirely.

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