

JACOB MOKGOLO

WAY to WORK

AS THEY TURNED into Stevens Street Mike and Tom saw the other men running wildly all over the muddled face of the street. The general urge was to the front because that way lay the bus rank. A group edged round another, stepping into one another's heels. A man leapt to the front and ran for freer ground. Another was running back, now and then peeping frantically over his shoulder. This one passed another furiously hailing a taxi in vain. From side streets yet more of the men scampered haphazardly into Stevens. A house, a gate disgorged yet another wary man.

The heat was on, for passes. And Mike knew that once it started it would carry on every morning into the next week or two; that he would have to dodge his way up to work every morning while the raid lasted. Usually, he would find his way out through side streets, small alleys or, if it came to a push, over fences. Now he was upset by seeing others returning who always joined him in this stratagem. All the possible ways out were locked.

Mike's hand clamped on that of Tom as he would check his progress.

"No," said Tom. "Don't have any fears. Come along. If you're with me you won't be stopped."

Mike wondered what bold trick Tom's caprice had organised for this occasion.

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But there was no time to argue, no time to consider. He had to go to work and the way lay through this unsafe path blocked by the police. He had only ten cents in his pocket, hardly enough for a taxi. Or even had he enough taxifare, to rush back to the taxi rank and still to wait there would result in his arriving late at work. And, besides, a fast enough policeman might be sent especially in pursuit of him if caught in the act of running back.

The two pressed on, Mike's heart throbbing madly at his side. The only reassurance came from the presence of his friend who had a reputation for cheeking the police with success, especially the White ones who are said to be cautious with an African who shows a bit of knowledge of legal procedure. One such actually pleaded with him the other day: "You want to have me lose my job, eh!"

They covered on, past an African constable squabbling with one man, a White recruit in his teens and without uniform chasing a man, stumbling and straining with gritted teeth to catch the man, chasing like one after a dire criminal. Mike thought: someone should trip the bastard and send him crashing with his teeth on the street cobbles. He did not so much fear a policeman who chased and fought. What he feared he knew lay ahead at the corner. There, scowling behind the thick, matted hedge trees of the last yard out, the big boys were way-laying the men. As if the African's

favourite occupation was to go breaking the law, as if the African would leave a warm bed, facing the inclement weather early in the morning only with the intention to do mischief in town, the police would stop every man. Perhaps it would never enter their heads that early-risers did so in answer to the call of duty; that a man's not having a pass on him did not lessen the importance of the duty-call?

THEY WERE NEARING the corner. Mike made to sneak behind a thickish group of men. Perhaps he might dodge through like a bullet if his friend's tricks failed. It was expedient to be sly in the streets of South Africa. You acted gentlemanly and the police would not accord you the respect you expected from them. Pulled you by the collar, jerked you, fired at you the insolent word, "Pas!" If you hesitated or tried to collect yourself for a gentle remonstrance you received a more rude jerk and "Pas, jong!"

Mike stole glances at the police, but he had that talent to be composed in spite of fear which was forced upon him by the hide-and-seek life he led with the police. He had always prayed that one day his employer might be serious about arranging his pass transfer, and he had to work in the meantime. And arrest was imminent, walking with him in his shadow.

Tom seized the very opportune moment when the police motioned towards the thickish group ahead. He dashed forward quickly, trying to steal through the broken line of four constables. The four fell over one another as they desired to outdo one the other over catching him, the cheeky one. Mike had scattered with the other fellows and already they had gained the line at the bus rank.

Tom was locked in the iron-fingered clutches of two constables.

"You were trying to run away, eh! Where's your pass?"

"They have seen my pass already," said Tom.

"You lie! Who's seen your pass?"

"The other policeman back there."

"All the same give it here."

"Why, you're really wasting my time. I must be at work at eight o'clock."

The man decided: "Oh, he refuses to show his pass. We take him in."

Tom resisted, and the two constables dragged him into the silent group of men

arrested in the corner. The police chief, Sergeant Daan, was vexed by the idea of the man resisting. He alternated his looks and questions between the constables and the resisting man. "Hey, what's this, Jack? What are you trying to do, you?"

Tom came to as the two constables relaxed their hold on him. He gathered his shirt into his trousers, restored his tie and collar to their due position. "I don't know what's wrong with this man," he indicated one of the constables. "He always treats me like this. Whatever he

has against such a quiet chap as me I don't know."

"What is it, Jack?" Sergeant Daan asked.

"He refuses to show his pass."

"No," Tom put in. "I told him the other policeman has already seen my pass and he doesn't want to understand. I don't know what's wrong with him. He's doing this for the third time now."

A hot exchange of words followed. Tom put his defence so strongly that the sergeant was likely to believe him. But he did not score.

"You lie! Go back there among those people." And Sergeant Daan pushed him into the group of men who made way for him as he faltered.

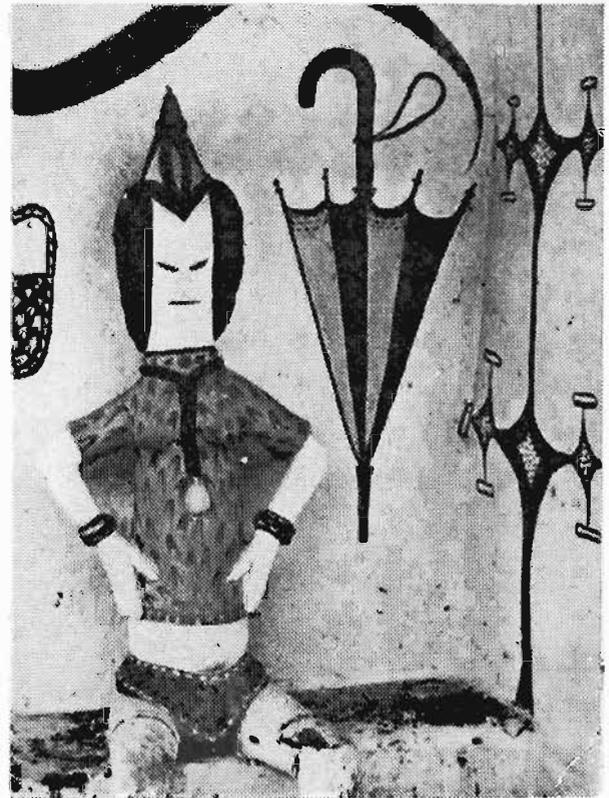
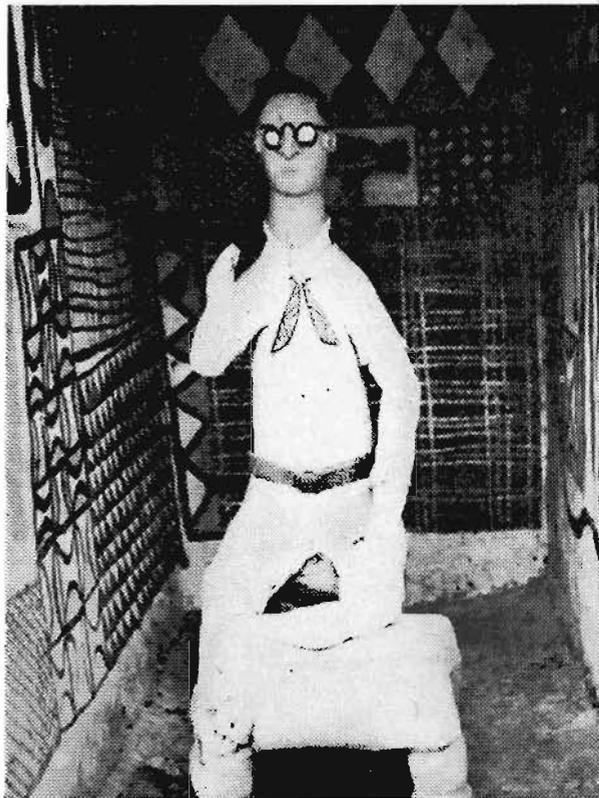
"Look . . . look . . ." Tom stammered forth.

"Hey, whom are you addressing in that manner?"

"I only want to ask if you think I must be arrested for no reason while I'm expected at work."

"You don't want to go to work."

"How can that be? You don't understand . . ."



Schoolmaster and Attendant of Ala

African Mud Sculpture by Ulli Beier (Cambridge University Press), 25s.

The brass, ivory and wood sculptures of the Benin region of Nigeria and Dahomey are well known.

Here is an introduction to the contemporary mud sculpture of the same area. It is full of vigour and yet, because of its material, is short-lived. The sculpture is most often housed in an *Mbari* hut centred round the earth goddess

Ala. Many of them are in modern dress, like this schoolmaster; and district commissioners in pith helmets and moustaches are very frequent. In visiting an *Mbari* hut an outsider "gets inside" the symbols of a culture.

"Shut your dirty trap and you'll go to work."

"Look . . . look . . ."

"You must not say to me look. What are you to speak to me like that?"

"I will go away. I must be at work."

As he started to move away the two constables closed the line with the grave duty of two sentries guarding an enemy prison camp. Tom was restored to the small ground in the midst of pass offenders that had suddenly become his narrow prison.

"Put the handcuffs on, Jack," commanded Sergeant Daan.

"Arrest me? What is the charge?"

"Resisting arrest."

"But I don't know why there should be this arrest. What is the offence?"

"Failing to produce."

"But I have the pass and I produced to the other policeman."

"I know better. And I will stand with you before the magistrate."

Sergeant Daan delivered these ready answers with the proud, impertinent air of one who knows a thing or two. The two constables pounced on Tom, jerked his arms forward. A paper parcel which he had managed to keep grasped in his armpit now fell to the ground. The handcuffs on the wrists, one constable picked up the paper, shoved it in the jacket pocket. But there was a book already stored in the pocket by Tom, and the paper was forced in, tearing one pocket corner. To add to the uncomfortable feeling of standing with arms tied in front, Tom's sides bulged and weighted. He was pushed into the group and warned not to edge to the front. And whenever a policeman caught him a foot ahead of the other men he was pushed back rudely: "Go back into that group. What do you think you are?"

He would not be pushed back easily like a tame lamb, but stood his ground, trying to shade a blow with the twin hands. And every slight shake of the hands propelled the manacle lock over the next tooth, tightening the iron rims, cutting into the wrists. Tom took several paces slowly to the front, till Sergeant Daan could not help noticing him.

"Where do you work? You're a clerk?"

Tom wanted to say no, I'm a labourer, but he thought perhaps he was running into unnecessary trouble when he only meant to act to help his friend. Besides, it would be harmless flattery to boast one's position to the police this once.

So he agreed he was a clerk. Sergeant Daan ignored him again as if he was unmoved, as if he must busy himself with more important work. But he was much embarrassed by the idea that here was a young man who could dare to question the fairness of his detachment, unnerving him before the other arrestees. It would be better if he were out of the way and not influencing these others. And he might still embarrass him before his chief at the police station. He came back to him in a calm mood.

"Look, I want to release you now. You see, you should not have acted as you did just now. If you have any trouble with my men you must bring them to me. I know how to handle them."

"Yes, they just did not conduct themselves politely."

"It may be so, but don't take the law into your hands. Bring them to me . . . I'll tell him to release you."

"I'm now going to be late and they may not believe that I was held by the police."

"No, wait. I'll be answerable." He produced a pocket-book from his tunic. "Here's our phone number. What's your name?" He wrote down the particulars.

Jackson produced the key with reluctance. His face was a swell of abuse against Tom. "Next time if I ask you for a pass you must produce it quickly."

Tom retorted easily, confidently: „Aaah, not you! You I wont show my pass."

The swell of abuse burst into a lava of rotten words flung at Tom: "But what is wrong with your head, eh? Don't you know I'm a policeman?" At the same time Jackson swung Tom by the cuffed hands, nearly toppling him to the rear. Tom came instantly forward trying to adjust with his elbows the hems of his clothes ruffled by the push.

"You see now, baas," the constable explained to the sergeant the insolent meaning of the African words that set him on to this pugilistic exercise. "He says he will never show me his pass."

The sergeant marched away with a wave of the hand. "O.K., leave him there. I will do the speaking before the magistrate." His juniors looked at Tom with sour grins, unconvinced.

THE LAST LINE AT THE RANK was swallowed up, the bus moved away, and the patrol started to march up Stevens Street.

Tom was the only one handcuffed, the last man in the coupled chain, the most reluctant of the lot. An old man with the stoop of age receded by degrees to the rear, was prodded with a baton. The women of Lady Selborne watched and exclaimed variously from verandah's; and the march went on, up the mountain rise, down a side street, up again, and stopped in front of constable Jackson's home while breakfast lasted.

Then the march picked a few corners and came down, a chain of about twenty, a good collection for one morning, for just a wait at the corner—and finally they met the van.

The police were conversing throughout the drive to town.

"Look, I caught almost half of this lot, and all of them would not be taken in. Had to run and battle. No, I must have this 'off' first."

"Jerrrr! I tell you this was nothing. Should have seen us when we were in the 'Ghost Squad' . . ."

"No, but for a recruit I think he's doing well."

The van entered the station yard in a hawling, chasing speed. The arrestees were bundled quickly into the charge office; there was no time to look about. The police were already hurrying about, possessing the place. The cuffs were painning Tom's bleeding wrists. He asked to be released. Jackson unlocked the cuffs, told him to come along into the office of the station commander. He found very little time to make any observation, and he hurried behind Jackson asking: "Where's Sergeant Daan?"

Sergeant Daan had disappeared.

The station commander fluttered the leaves of Tom's book without stopping to read any part of it. He said: "Whether you are asked to show your pass a hundred times every day, you must produce it."

Tom hummed an assent and was told to go.

As he waited for the bus with five or six fellows already released like him, Tom felt pity for the harmless fellows who were trying to live an honest life: One with a paper authorising a temporary exemption; another with an injunction from the labour bureau to come for a new pass the following month; and still a third with a boss who locked up his pass at his office while he ran last-minute errands. He felt none for himself. ●