

# *The God of All Grace*

A novel based upon true events



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## **Dedication**

One thousand hills.

One hundred days.

One million graves.

This book is dedicated to my many friends in Rwanda who survived an unspeakable horror with an unquenchable spirit.

## **Prayer**

“May the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, restore you and make you strong,”  
from I Peter 5:10



## **Note**

*The God of All Grace* is a work of historical fiction set in the context of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and its aftermath. While most characters are fictional, several are historical and anchor the narrative into its time and place. I wish to thank all those in Rwanda and in America who allowed me to weave threads of their own lives into the fabric of this novel.

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## Part One: The Extermination

These are the basic facts: The Republic of Rwanda is a small land-locked nation situated in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa. As a temperate tropical highland, the soil is fertile and the landscape lush. With rugged mountains, terraced slopes, and snowy volcanic peaks, Rwanda is known as the *Land of 1000 hills*.



Today, thirteen million people inhabit Rwanda, making it the most densely populated country on the continent. Traditionally there have been three tribes in Rwanda: Hutu composing about 85%, Tutsi about 14%, and Twa (pigmy) 1%. Official languages are Kinyarwanda, French, English, and Swahili. Ninety percent of the people identify as Christian—both Roman Catholic and Protestant. Poverty is widespread with an average wage of three dollars per day.

Isolated from the Western world, Rwanda was the last parcel in Africa to fall into European hands. Germans first arrived in 1892, then Belgians took over in 1916. Both colonizers promoted racial division. They viewed the minority Tutsis as closer in kind to Europeans and elevated them to positions of power over the majority Hutu. This exacerbated the feudal status of peasant Hutus and royal Tutsis. In the 1930s, Belgian overlords introduced ethnic identity cards, enshrining tribal differences.

With the coming of democracy and majority rule, racial roles reversed. Once disenfranchised Hutu now lorded over Tutsis. In 1959, Hutu extremists forced a hundred thousand Tutsis to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Following independence in 1962, cycles of violence recurred in which newly-exiled Tutsis attacked government forces along the borders and Hutu militias retaliated by killing Tutsi civilians.

In 1990, a rebel group called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), invaded Rwanda from its base in Uganda, initiating the Rwandan Civil War. The RPF gained a foothold along the northern frontier, but could not win a decisive victory. The Hutu president of Rwanda half-heartedly negotiated for peace in Arusha, Tanzania. In April of 1994, his jet was shot down over the capital city of Kigali, sparking the mass killing of Tutsis.

It is at this point in the story of Rwanda, the events of this novel begin to unfold.

The Rwandan genocide which followed the president's death was distinctive in several ways. First, it was rapid. Like accelerant tossed onto long-smoldering embers, the entire nation burst into sudden flame. For one hundred days of extermination, the death toll averaged a staggering 10,000 souls a day.

Second, it was well-planned. Organizers used census data, employment records, and church rolls to target every Tutsi in the country. Attacks were not spontaneous, but orchestrated from the highest echelons of government.

Third, it was intimate. For generations, the two tribes had freely intermingled, intermarried, and interacted on a first-name basis. When the slaughter began, neighbor pounced upon neighbor. People who sat side-by-side in church on Sunday might kill a fellow parishioner on Monday. Friendship did not protect the doomed.

Fourth, the genocide was low-tech. Throughout the countryside, machetes and clubs were the weapons of choice. Perpetrators often returned home after a day's *work* drenched in blood. Even when guns were used, killers typically executed at arm's length.

Fifth, the killing was effective. In many regions of Rwanda, the slaughter stopped only because the killers ran out of available Tutsi victims.

Yet within this African holocaust, there were miracles of survival. For the thousands who endured, God provided strength and restoration. It is on behalf of these survivors this book was written.

## Chapter 1

### Evil Unloosed

April 6, 1994 – In southern Uganda and northern Tanzania

Victor Kwizera rubbed his blood-flecked eyes, straining to read the smudged newsprint. This scholar-turned-soldier sat on a wobbly stool beneath a dim lamppost—the only available illumination in this isolated military compound. Victor pronounced out-loud the English words: “President Habyarimana of Rwanda meets with African leaders to discuss regional peace.” The headline from the *Kampala Monitor* was nearly a week old.

Victor gleaned Habyarimana had been meeting in Dar es Salem with the leaders of Zaire, Tanzania, and Burundi in order to patch together the broken Arusha Peace Accords. Victor had never set foot in his home country, yet he doubted power-sharing between his Tutsi people and extremist Hutu could ever be possible. Still, he hoped for peace in Rwanda.

Victor folded the community newspaper upon his knees. He second-guessed his recent decision to join the military wing of the Rwanda Patriotic Front, an army calling itself *Inkotanyi*, which translates as “we will fight without delay, never give up.” After quelling doubts, he stared into the shadows.

A dozen fellow recruits lingered under his lamppost. Victor noted a new acquaintance named Sano Ruhinda. By appearance, he looked about thirty, short and muscular. By camp rumor he was Hutu, but it was not appropriate to ask such questions. Sano’s eyes fixed upon a tattered French Bible. Victor admired his spiritual focus.

Victor then turned his head to observe young Tomani who danced with a transistor radio pushed to his ear. The high-spirited sixteen-year-old was constantly swaying to the catchy tunes of Kigali station RTLM – Thousand Hills Radio.

Victor studied Tomani’s body language. He figured a rocking head and shuffling feet indicated a popular song. A clicking tongue and clinched fist meant another anti-Tutsi invective, something like: “The Rwanda Patriotic Force is a brood of cockroaches and we will kill you all.” But what odd combination was this? Shuffling feet and clicking tongue?

Tomani ambled near Sano and cranked up the volume. “Listen to these words of Simon Bikindi. He’s singing to you as a tribal brother.”

*Hmmm...Ngire? Mbwirabumva. I speak to those who understand.  
I had a revelation from God, I am reviving the old heroes back to life.  
Me, I hate those Hutu who are ashamed of their identity.  
I despise Hutu who don't remember the slogan that was said over  
there in Butare: "Starting at one side, kill everyone."  
I hate those Hutu with fat bellies, who feed only themselves, and who  
enjoy gaining favor through flattery and begging.  
Fortunately for us, there are few of those traitors,  
I speak to those who understand. Come listen.*

Sano jumped to his feet, grabbed the radio, and flung it into the mud. “Yes, I am Hutu, but I do not hate my own people. You see. I am first Rwandan by birth, then second Hutu by custom.” Pointing to all who surrounded him, “You are my people. You are my family. All men who love liberty are my brothers.”

Victor stepped between the two recruits, extending his lanky frame to its full height of two meters. He growled, “Tomani, step back.” He then shouted with sweeping gestures. “Did you know Sano is like many of us? I heard both his dad and mom were killed by para-military gangs. Why did they die? Because they spoke out against militia atrocities. His parents were protecting people of our tribe. He is on our side, not with the enemy.”

Sano responded, “Thank you for those words but I can defend myself.” Then, turning to Tomani, “Can you point out one disloyal action I have taken against our cause? Yes, I am Hutu, but I am Christian foremost.” He held high his book. “Every day I strive to follow these words of Jesus. I vow to protect the innocent and punish the guilty.”

The recruits nodded their approval while Tomani retrieved his radio and muttered beneath his breath, “We need more vicious brutes and fewer pious saints.”

A sudden cloudburst doused the fiery tempers. The lamp blinked off and the billets soon filled with thirty-two dripping-wet bodies. The platoon squeezed together on their plastic-tarped floor.

The four walls of their dormitory were constructed of sun-hardened cinderblock. Red adobe smeared with white plaster covered its exterior surface. Bamboo rods supplemented the inside wall. Four rough-hewn windows furnished daylight and two creaky doors provided access. Raw timber held aloft a corrugated iron-sheet roof.

Each apprentice soldier was assigned a wicker sleeping mat, a thin sleeping sheet, and a cloth duffle bag to stow eating utensils, hygiene items, and personal objects. Most young men hid a few possessions under their mats or in a wicker basket. Some stashed a flask of *urwagwa* – banana beer; others hid a wad of Rwandan francs.

A critical feature of construction was the drainage ditch which encircled the barracks. Because of the April deluge, this canal was constantly monitored and dredged. A few meager planks provided a short walkway over the ditch. Then emerged the vast sea of mud.

In total darkness raindrops pelted the metal roof which reverberated like Burundian drums. Victor fell asleep to the percussive concert.

About nine o’clock he was roused from slumber by exuberant shouts: “What? No! I can’t believe it. Yes!”

In breathless excitement, Tomani gasped aloud, “Listen up. Listen up,” The men bolted upright on their mats. “I just heard this on RTLM. They report a jet plane has crashed in Kigali. And get this: Habyarimana was on board. They are saying the president was killed, but they haven’t yet found a body.”

A few men cheered. “Hooray! The great devil is dead.”

Sano raised a voice of caution. “No, no, no. The great devil may be dead, but his legion of demons is about to be unleashed. Don’t you see? We must alert the officers.”

Victor slipped on his damp clothes and stepped into the downpour. He groped his way to the officer’s hut and pounded on the door. He heard rustling, then the door creak open.

“This better be important,” Captain Bidogo intoned.

Victor reported in whispers. “We think Juvenal Habyarimana is dead. Private Tomani heard this on his radio.”

“What?” Wheeling about he shouted, “You, Mwiza, turn on that radio. Ngabo, gas up the motorbike. Stand by to race your boda-boda to Headquarters Camp for orders.”

The news was confirmed. Both the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi had been shot from the sky with a surface-to-air missile. In the Kinyarwanda language, rabid voices now crackled over airwaves. “The Tutsis did this. Someone must make them disappear for good, wipe them from human memory, exterminate these vermin from the face of the earth. Let’s do the work now.”

And the devil’s work commenced that very night. In Kigali, a *crisis committee* of Hutu Power was formed. Colonel Theoneste Bagosora seized the reins of government and sent out his Presidential Guard to round up and murder respected judges, journalists, labor leaders, and cabinet ministers. Hutu militias immediately set up street barricades to identify and kill any person with a Tutsi ID card as well as any Hutu who dared stand in the path of their slaughter. Within twenty-four hours, all opposition figures were either dead or in hiding. A coup d’état had taken place. The peace-seeking faction within Rwanda had been decapitated.

From the starting gun, the fanatical goal—the genocidal dream—was to radically reconstruct Rwanda as a Hutu-only nation. In an African echo of Nazi Germany, the killing campaign became known as the *final solution* to the Tutsi problem.

The billet of men endured an hour of uncertainty, then Sergeant Mwiza opened the door to read a brief military directive: “Settle down for the night; get your affairs in order; tomorrow we begin the liberation of our homeland.”

Some closed their eyes resting as best they could. Others chattered away their tension. Many monitored radio RTL. M.

At age twenty-five, Victor proved to be a natural leader. He paced the tarpaulin, cracking jokes and calming nerves. He seemed to have a Rwandan proverb for every occasion. On this portentous night he favored, “You can outdistance that which is running after you, but not what is running inside you.”

Concerns seemed to cluster into three sets of opposites.

“Will I be killed or will I survive?”

“Will I run away or will I show courage?”

“How about my family in Rwanda? Are they safe or are they suffering?”

After just one week in this training Battalion, all knew the answer to one question. “No, not one of us is prepared for battle.”

As the billet quieted, Victor lay awake in a vortex of thought. He prayed to *Imana*—the God of his Christian upbringing, but his petitions seemed to bounce off the iron-sheet roof. His mind finally found peace when his ears discovered the comforting monotones of Sano’s sacred supplications.

All too soon, Sergeant Mwiza flung open the door. “Out of bed, you forest baboons. Your nation needs you. You have five minutes to stow your gear and align to the left of the flagpole.”

“Yes, sir, sergeant,” boomed the lusty voices.

At two degrees south of the equator, the African sun rose without hesitation. With a measure of mercy, it also rose on this Tuesday morning without rainfall. The camp had altered complexion during the night. Four troop carriers had arrived and formed a neat row. Uniformed figures appeared like phantoms from the tall grass. A protective perimeter now encircled the compound.

Victor stood in ankle-deep mud surrounded by sixty men rigid at attention. Two dozen barefoot boys had swollen their ranks. Tomani whispered, “Where did these raggedy no-goods come from?”

Sergeant Mwiza overheard the comment, “Private, did anyone give you permission to talk? Drop down and do pushups until I tell you to stop.”

Victor did his best not to break a smile as Tomani plunged his face into the gooey red mud.

Finally, Captain Bidogo mounted a wooden platform. “Men of the Rwanda Patriotic Force-Inkotanyi, stand at parade rest and open your ears. The moment we have dreaded—the moment we have longed for and the moment for which we have been preparing—has arrived. That liar and scoundrel called Juvenal Habyarimana was killed last night. Good riddance. We don’t know who shot him from the sky, but we suspect it was a snake from his own brood of vipers.

“That one death is sparking a blaze across our homeland. Reports tell us the cowards have murdered our prime minister and the Belgian peacekeepers. If the enemy is so bold as to commit these crimes, they will not hesitate to slaughter every Tutsi—man, woman, child—until our nation is choked with blood from one end to the other. But we will stop them!”

“We will stop them!” returned the roar.

“We will save our people!” shouted the captain above the din. “We will return Rwanda to peace. We will let nothing stand in our way. This is our sacred duty and we vow this to our God, our nation, our family, and our friends. Swear it. Swear it.”

As the fervor quieted into resolve, the company dispersed. Captain Bidogo called Victor aside. “Meet me in my hut in one hour. I have a special duty for you.”

Victor had no clue as to his fate. Had he done something wrong? Why had he been singled out? After reporting to his captain, Victor was told to stand at ease.

Captain Bidogo eyed him from across a table. “Private Kwizera, I have heard good things about you. My sergeants tell me you have potential as an officer. They say you were an organizer in the Rwandan Alliance for National Unity. Your country needs competent men in this moment of crisis.”

He examined Victor from head to toe: thin but rugged body, large red-streaked eyes—a hint of malaria, a compact head projecting an intelligent face. “They tell me you were born in this camp.”

“Almost sir. My mom says she gave birth to me just across the border in Tanzania. I don’t remember. All I have ever known is Camp Oruchinga.”

“So, I take it you’re familiar with the land and people in Isingiro District?”

“Yes, sir. Since childhood I’ve run down these roads and across these hills, as far north as Mbarara and south across the frontier into the deep forest.”

“They also say you have a gift for mobilizing, that you are responsible for half the troops in this unit.”

With a chuckle he replied, “Not half, sir, but a greater number than my fingers and toes.”

Looking at his notes, the captain continued his interview, “And did you attend Makelele University in Kampala?”

“Yes, sir, for two years. But I ran out of money. Ugandans make it tough for non-citizens to stay enrolled. As a refugee I had no status.”

“Yes, yes, I understand. We Banyarwanda are strangers in a strange land.” With a hardened demeanor, the captain interrogated. “Is it true you have been actively smuggling weapons across the river into Tanzania? Do you know that’s a violation of the Peace Accords?”

Victor was silent.

“Well, speak up, man.”

Victor clenched his teeth, finally whispering, “I cannot say. Sir, I am under obligation not to share that information.”

The captain demanded, “I order you to tell me.”

Victor looked straight ahead trembling.

Finally, the captain rose to his feet and barked an order. “Sergeant Mwiza, come in here and bring your weapon.”

The burly soldier pushed open the door.

The captain’s face softened to a smile. “Sargeant Mwiza, meet my special assistant for local intelligence, a man who can hold his tongue. You two will be working together.”

Victor’s initial assignment was to visit the sprawling Nakivale Refugee Camp, a short distance along the road to Mbarara. This immense settlement was the largest in Uganda hosting upward of 200,000 Rwandan refugees. It was from this settlement Victor had carried out most of his mobilizing. With the onset of active war, recruitment proved easy. After just two days’ effort,

he marched three-hundred fit young men to Captain Bidogo. The entire battalion was astonished at the number and quality of the green recruits. Victor told his friend Sano, “And I turned away as many as I recruited.”

Victor’s second task was to scout the Tanzanian side of the Kagera River and report his findings to Battalion headquarters. Sargent Mwiza with his Kalashnikov rifle would accompany him. Sano joined the group as one who was fluent in French, English, and Swahili.

At midnight, the reconnaissance team crossed the swollen river. Their orders were to follow the waterway upstream until they linked with their battalion at the Rwanda border town of Kagitumbo. The three were to gather intelligence along the route. Victor knew the land well. He had often tramped the river course during his days as an arms smuggler.

Victor moved silently in the darkness, a peekaboo moon providing occasional illumination. He encountered no one for five hours, hearing only an occasional watercraft, dog bark, or cock crow. At first light Sano located a small hollow in a thicket of hedge-thorns. “Perfect,” Mwiza told Victor. “This narrow path is the only access in for an attacker.”

“Yes,” rejoined Victor, “but the same path is also the only way for us to escape such an attack.”

“Don’t worry.” The sergeant tapped his rifle butt. “I’ve dropped many an enemy with this weapon. You two get some rest. I’ll keep first watch.”

Lying shoulder to shoulder under a common tarp, Victor did manage to evade the drizzle and catch a little sleep.

With the obscure sun well above the horizon, Victor resumed his slog through a steady rain. Rubber shoes protected his feet while a wide-brimmed hat deflected raindrops away from his eyes. However, from neck to knee, his skin was continually soaked.

Around noon Victor stumbled across an off-road shelter constructed of bamboo poles, wicker rope, and thatch. “For cows, I think.” Sniffing the walls, he confirmed “Yep, cows.”

Sano offered, “You two eat and rest. I’ll stand watch.”

Victor and Mwiza double-folded the tarp into a cushion then sat in a corner of the cow pen. Each pulled from his knapsack a plastic container of beans. Victor began to spoon the morsels into his mouth.

Mwiza nudged him with an elbow. “Try some of this. I picked it along the path; do you know wild spinach?”

Victor looked at the vegetation. “You picked dodo?”

“That’s right. Just mix it with the beans. It stretches them into a healthy meal.”

Victor pinched a leaf of the green stuff then flicked it to the ground in disgust. “I don’t eat dodo. Can’t stand the stuff. Do you want to know why?”

Mwiza nodded in amusement.

Victor cleared his throat, then began to relate one of his well-worn stories. A twinkle sparked in his eyes. “You know I was raised in the Oruchinga Refugee Camp, right? The place

was always overrun with us Banyarwanda. My shanty could never produce enough food and we all depended on UN aid for rice and beans. One day the deliveries stopped. It was a dry season and we became desperate. The only food mama could scrounge for me was dodo. Day after day, all I ate was that awful weed. But then a miracle happened.”

Mwiza urged the story teller to continue. Sano inched closer, beginning to follow the words.

“I grew to love these.” Victor held up a single bean and studied it between his thumb and forefinger. “My mama taught me an important lesson during that dry season. Unknown to me, she had hidden a bag of uncooked beans under her sleeping mat. When I saw her walk out the door with this bag, I grew so excited. *Now I could eat!* But no, mama walked right past me to the furrowed earth, picked up a hoe, and filled her own mouth with the beans”.

Sano interrupted, “What? Did she swallow them herself?”

“No, no. But that’s what I thought at the time and so I began to cry. You have to understand. I was so hungry. But mama struck a hole in the ground and spit one bean into the center of it. She dug another hole, spit another bean, and so on—until the bag was empty. Then she told me and sis to walk down to the creek, fill a jerry can, and pour a cup of water into each hole. That took us all day.

“I finally understood what she was doing. *Invest in today so you can harvest for tomorrow.* And my family did survive. The rains returned in a few weeks; the district provided meager bananas; and in a few months, my family picked a crop of beans. So now you know why I love beans but hate dodo.”

“Good story.” Sano laughed, “Let’s call it *Spitting Beans.*” Then pulling three tiny bananas from his rucksack, “How about something sweet before continuing our journey.”

Mwiza joked, “Yes, it’s time to give the cows back their home.”

Victor walked in the lead, followed by Mwiza at a dozen steps, then Sano. If Victor spotted someone walking toward him, he would stop and begin to sing. Mwiza and his rifle would fade into the shrubs. Sano would do the same if a stranger approached from the rear.

In this manner, Victor passed two boys and a goat. Then four men strolled up from behind. Sano greeted them with a song. Victor heard the ruckus and ran to the rear. The men were threatening Sano with *pangas*—long butcher knives. The bandits turn tail and ran when they saw the muzzle of Mwiza’s Kalashnikov.

“Let’s walk to the side of the road,” the soldier advised. “It will be slower, but safer.” Keeping the river over their right shoulders, the recon team struggled forward.

Victor instinctively hit the ground when he heard clattering metal and shouting voices. “I tell you they were around here somewhere. I think they were Rwandans.”

After twenty minutes of silence, the three edged forward. The rain had stopped; the forest had darkened; and the gibbous moon had risen by the time they found a suitable hiding spot. Victor pulled out his map and pointed, “I think we’re almost to the bend in the Kagera River. From that point we cross into Rwanda. Let’s wait here until midnight. We’ll then move on,

feeling our way along the riverbank. We should see house lights on the far shore when we arrive opposite Kagitumbo.”

The trio rested on the tarp, tucked between fallen timbers. Mwiza closed his tired eyes, rifle clutched to his side. Victor pulled out a tiny flashlight to further examine his map. He glanced up to notice Sano counting beads. Victor switched off his light, then spoke in a barely audible voice, “Sorry to interrupt you. I’m curious. Can you explain to me what that necklace is about?”

“It’s called a *rosary*. It helps me to pray, to stay close to God. Each bead I count is a separate prayer. First, I locate the crucifix with my fingertips and recite a prayer, then for each bead I touch I recite another prayer. By the time I complete the circle, I have spoken five decades or fifty prayers. Some of them are short like the *Hail Mary* and others are long like the *Apostle’s Creed*. Some of the prayers change with the days of the week. My prayers center on the life of Christ and on the Virgin Mary whose focus was her son.

“When I began this daily practice two years ago, I found it difficult to remember words and to recite for thirty minutes straight. Now it’s a joy and a high point of my day. And really, once you get the hang of it, it’s not that difficult. Like most accomplishments, it just takes discipline and practice.” The speaker lapsed into meditation.

“Sano, are you willing to share your story with me. I’ve heard the gossip from the others; something about you being a Catholic priest, studying in France, and your parents getting killed because they supported the Arusha Peace Plan. Did you really find your way to Nakivale Refugee Camp to join us freedom fighters? Can a priest carry a rifle and kill?”

“What you say is close to the truth. I am not yet a priest. I have taken my final vows, but have yet to be ordained. I am studying at the Catholic University in Belgium not in France. My rector permitted a one-year absence to sort things out in Rwanda; and yes, my father was killed last Christmas day. He was murdered while walking out of church. My dad was the mayor of Gabiro. I have been without a mother for many years.”

Victor pondered his words. “So, do you count yourself as a soldier—a freedom fighter?”

“That’s difficult to answer. I doubt you know much about the founder of my holy order, Saint Dominic. He was not a soldier per se, but a preacher of the Gospel. Yet, he did combat heresy. He fought a spiritual and intellectual battle against an evil teaching called *Albigensian*. I believe that *Hutu Power* is an evil teaching, a doctrine of demons. I am returning to my homeland as a soldier of the cross to vanquish a blasphemy in which my own tribe seeks to annihilate yours. Can there be a greater sin than genocide? A greater heresy than preaching human extinction? I also wish to return to my home church of Saint Sebastian in Gabiro. I am compelled to visit my priest, Father Silas, seek out my surviving family, and save whomever I am able from the edge of the machete.”

The air grew still as the men eased into sleep.

At the hour when the Southern Cross peaks above the horizon, a volley of distant gunshots echoed down the valley. The men sprang up. “One o’clock,” whispered Mwiza looking up from his illuminated watch dial. “Somebody’s having a party and we need to join it.”

Victor quizzed him, “Where did those shots come from? How far away?”

“From the west, maybe Kagitumbo. I just heard rifles, not artillery. I can’t guess how many.” Then after a pause, “But listen, there’s more, now the thud of hand grenades. It can’t be much farther to the battle.”

The three strode parallel to the shoreline, about five paces off the roadway. In the dim starlight Victor began to see shacks and piers dot the waterfront. He heard more distant battle noise and now near-by vehicles sputtering down the road.

Sano spoke up, “I want to duck down within earshot of the road and listen for voices.”

Just as Victor reached the road ditch, a dozen men rushed by. “Angalia,” one shouted.

Sano whispered to the others, “That’s Swahili for *watch out*. By the chatter, I think they’re Tanzanian military.”

Victor and Mwiza nodded in agreement. The staccato of automatic weapon fire filled the air. The three dove for cover when bullets whizzed overhead.

Further down the road, confused voices shouted out, “*Forces rwandaises de defense. Ne tirez pas*—Rwanda Defense Forces. Don’t shoot.”

“That’s the *Forces Armees Rwanda* for sure,” Sano narrated. Then in bafflement, “But what is the FAR doing on this side of the river?”

“Just one thing I can figure,” Mwiza mused. “Our boys chased them here.”

As the three eavesdropped on further conversation, several FAR soldiers surrendered their weapons to the Tanzanians. Sano strained to catch the interaction. “It’s as we thought. Kagitumbo is now liberated.” The men clasped hands in jubilation.

But then another round of shooting echoed from the west. This time accompanied by the boom of cannon. Sano hung his head in disappointment. “It sounds like the fighting continues.”

The sergeant turned his ears to the west. “No, I’ve heard that sound before. Those are not the booms of battle but the thunder of *hurrah*, letting the world know that our RPF has won a victory.”

With stealth, Victor passed the final kilometer, ducking into the bush whenever shadows approached. At last, he heard the tumult of the Kagera River. Creeping on all fours, he spotted raging fires on the far shore, reddening the sky.

Mwiza suggested they hide in the papyrus reeds until dawn. “I think it’s less likely we’ll get shot in daylight.” Victor and Sano deferred to his judgment.

As the horizon brightened to their backs, Mwiza spotted three figures on the water moving toward them in a small craft. One stood upright displaying a Tanzanian flag. When the boat struck shore, Victor was stunned. Not ten meters to their left, a dozen armed men burst from the swaddling reeds and rushed to the boat. The group huddled near the water and began to converse in Swahili.

Mwiza dropped his rifle then whispered. “Trust me and do what I do.” Invisible within the thicket of reeds, he first shouted in English, “Long live the Rwanda Patriotic Front.” He repeated the words even louder in Kinyarwanda.

Five riflemen turned abruptly and leveled their weapons toward the reeds. They called out in Swahili, “Come forward slowly. Raise your hands.” The three-man team reached to the sky and shuffled to the shoreline.

The official who held the flag looked each man over. Then he queried Mwiza, “Who are you? Where did you come from?”

He sang out in his native tongue, “Sergeant Francis Mwiza of Third Battalion, Rwanda Patriotic Army.”

One of the Rwandan boatmen stepped forward to look the man in his face. “Yes, I know this soldier. He’s one of us.”

The Tanzanian official continued his interrogation. “And how did you come to end up on this side of the river?”

Sargent Mwiza shrugged out the words, “We just got lost. That’s all.”

The officer scoffed, pondered a moment, then told his Rwandan counterpart, “If you claim this man, you can take him with you. We don’t want trouble.”

The sergeant then blurted out, “And these two are recruits to the RPF. They got lost with me.”

The response was sharp. “Damn you all. All of you go back to Rwanda. We don’t want your kind on this side of the river.”

The three clambered into the boat while the Tanzanian cohort retreated into the forest. Once they arrived at mid-current, the two oarsmen broke into smiles, “Lost indeed. How did your reconnaissance go?” Laughter reigned among the five men.

Release followed mirth. “Look. We are halfway across the Kagera River. Now I can tell you officially, ‘Welcome to Rwanda!’”

The comrades locked arms in relief and in unison belted out, “Rwanda Ninzia”— which translates as, *Rwanda is Beautiful*.”

Sano rejoiced the loudest, “Not only is this my home country, but also my home province of Byumba.

Victor then glanced upriver. “Hey, oarsman, pay attention to your navigation. I’ve never seen so many logs floating downstream.”

The boatmen’s merriment melted into melancholy. The one steering the craft replied, “And you pay attention to these logs as they drift by.”

As Victor peered into the brightening gloom, the *log* changed aspect.

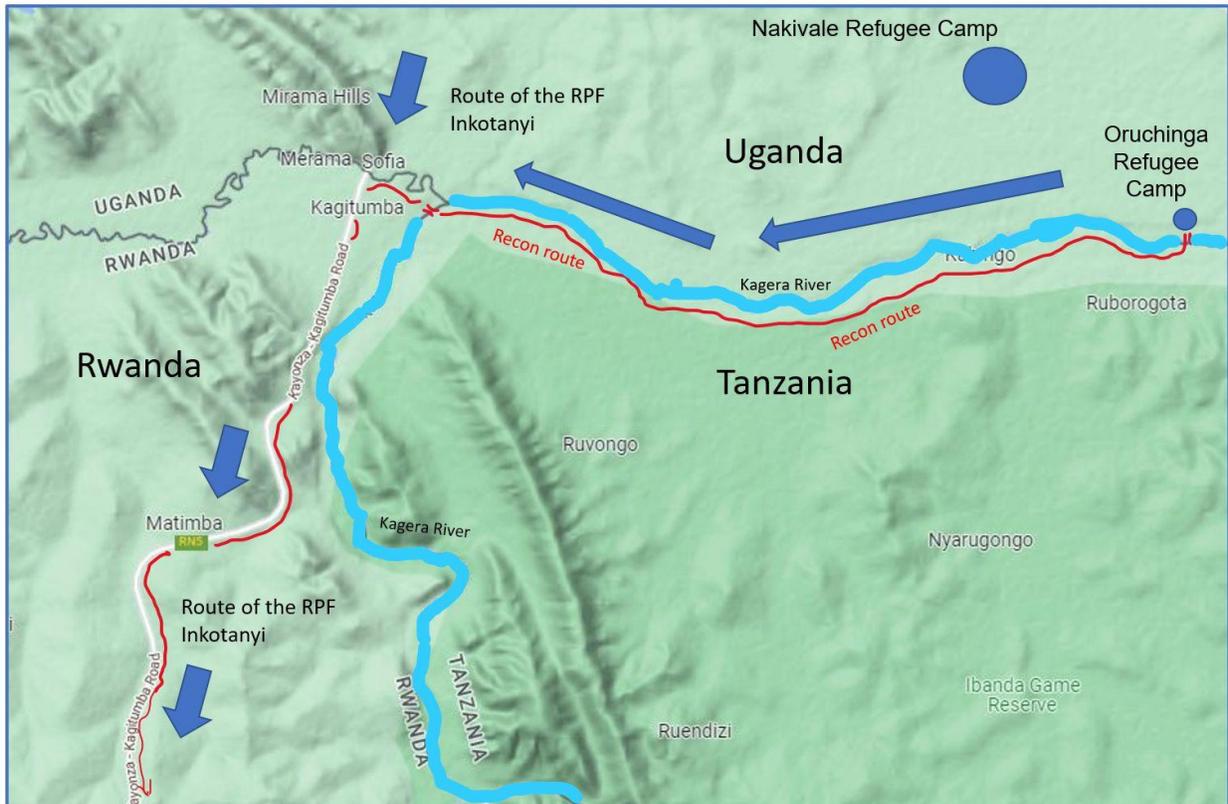
First a colorful patch of cloth swirled into view. Then a naked arm flopped in the current. Both allured and repulsed, the onboard witnesses shook with emotion. At last, they recognized the female corpse bobbing in the torrent. Another *log* appeared, then another, then a baby *log*.

The oarsmen increased their pace.

Sano bowed his head making the sign of the cross.

Victor choked out a few lines of the anthem, *Rwanda Ninziza*, then with sadness repeated the greeting, “Welcome to Rwanda.”

Sergeant Mwiza swept his hand across the waters in a sardonic gesture, “Yes, and may I introduce you to our welcoming committee.”



## Chapter 2

### Inhabiting the Horror

April 1994—near the border town of Kagitumbo, Rwanda

After navigating a flotilla of human remnants, the boatmen touched ground in Rwanda. A captain with the RPF ushered the recon team aside for an interrogation. When he was sure of their identity, the officer gave badges to Victor, Sano, and Mwiza. Within an hour the three were escorted to a door marked with the name *Major Bidogo*. After salutes, Sergeant Mwiza spoke up, “Sir, I see congratulations are in order. Your promotion is well deserved.”

“And congratulations to you as well, *Lieutenant Mwiza*. And to you, *Lieutenants Kwizera and Ruhinda*.”

The three sputtered in disbelief.

“Men, these are not ordinary times and we must take extraordinary measures. Our army is doubling in size. Our officer ranks need quality soldiers. I have reviewed a hundred records and you three have risen to the top. Tomorrow, a dignitary will arrive in camp and he will make the promotions official. Now, enough about that. Let’s hear your recon report.”

The three men recounted details of their two-day trek through Tanzania, but since the northeast corner of Rwanda now lay in RPF hands, their observations were of little value.

Victor spent the remainder of the day walking through Kagitumbo, happy to make footprints in his home soil. He spent the hours conversing with a dozen men he had mobilized for the patriotic army.

At night under a make-shift canopy, images of floating corpses haunted his dreams. The morning brought some relief through a hardy breakfast. The cook encouraged him to eat as much beef as he could, quipping, “This big-horned steer who bravely sacrificed himself in battle yesterday will not have died in vain.”

Victor began to notice an abundance of vehicles and smartly-dressed military police. He figured the dignitary was on his way. Victor also noted hundreds of RPF troops uniformed in identical green short-sleeve shirts with matching short pants. He spotted a supply officer issuing the gear and asked him about the clothing.

“These are from the old East Germany—their summer uniforms. Do you know much about history? When that country collapsed, the new government was stuck with a warehouse of obsolete uniforms and equipment. We Rwandese are clever and for just a few thousand American dollars bargained for all this.” He gestured proudly over the soccer field. “What do you think? Looks good, right?”

It took all morning for the two thousand soldiers to configure themselves in proper military order. Victor stood in a new uniform next to Major Bidogo and in a unit designated as “Reserve force—Personnel section.”

In snatches of conversation, Lieutenant Kwizera discerned his assignment. Victor would remain to the rear of advancing troops to oversee *Personnel Processing Station Three*. The

principal function of his unit was to maintain army personnel records and interview civilians and enemy combatants sent to him from the battleline.

Major Bidogo emphasized the importance of his assignment. “Not as the point of the spear,” he said, “but as the shank which enables the spear to pierce into the enemy’s body.”

Victor connected with Sano and Mwiza while practice-marching about the soccer field. They too were assigned to Station Three. Victor voiced disappointment at not gaining an infantry position saying, “All I ever wanted is to be an Inkotanyi fighter.”

Mwiza responded, “Killing people with bullets is not as glorious as it’s made out to be.” He told Victor his own task would be to interrogate prisoners of war, adding, “That’s alright with me. I’ve survived four years of combat and don’t want to press my luck.”

Sano told the others he was commissioned as a chaplain. “I want you to know I will be a soldier of Rwanda on the outside, but a soldier of God on the inside.” He retrieved a scapular tucked inside his shirt. “This string around my neck is a reminder that I must remain faithful to my calling to a holy order. See the medallion of the Blessed Virgin at my throat. It is the only decoration I need”. He kissed the object and returned it to its secret place.

He continued, “You know my hometown is this Eastern Byumba Province. I know the people and customs of this area. My main task will be to address the spiritual needs of the soldiers and displaced civilians. I think my duties fit me well.”

A female lieutenant introduced herself to the men. Until recently Bernice Kabanda had been a school principal in Kampala. Now she wore the green uniform and shoulder tabs of an army officer. Her task at Station Three was to turn out ID cards and act as an advocate for women’s issues. As the hour of noon approached, a dozen enlisted soldiers filled out the ranks of Personnel Processing Station Three.

As the lieutenants continued to discuss their military duties, a hush came over the parade field, followed by the amplified command of *Attention*. Mwiza glanced at his watch: precisely twelve noon.

A dozen dignitaries were seated on a distant platform with flags of the RPF draped as a background. After a command to parade rest, the two-thousand-man contingent watched as a tall, reed-thin, spectacled man approached the microphone. At thirty-seven years of age, Paul Kagame was an unlikely general. He appeared too quiet, too intellectual, too unpretentious, and too young to lead an insurgent movement of fifty-thousand freedom fighters. Yet, he had exuded competence whenever he entered a room and now he inspired confidence as he spoke before this assembled multitude.

“My fellow countrymen of this great nation of Rwanda; my devoted soldiers in this grand crusade of good against evil; my partner patriots of all tribes, ages, sexes, and backgrounds; we are standing on the sacred soil of Rwanda!”

An officer to the side of the general flung his arms in the air provoking the entire mass of soldiery to burst into cheer.

The general continued, “We will never retreat, never step backward. We will only advance. We will fight those who with impunity murder our people. We will fight for the right of

all Banyarwanda to return home from exile. We demand only to live in peace and security within the boundaries of our own land; Nothing more we ask; nothing less we'll accept."

After three more cycles of speech and applause, General Kagame concluded by shouting out "We will fight without delay, never give up."

An aide stepped to the microphone. "We are about to take an oath of allegiance to the RPF-Inkotanyi. Stand at attention. Raise your right hand. State your name in full, then repeat after me."

I do solemnly swear before these members of the RPF, acknowledging that I clearly understand the RPF principles and goals set forth to promote the dignity for every Rwandan living inside Rwanda or abroad, being young or old, even future generations that are not yet born.

I swear and promise that I must team up with every RPF member, currently and in the future.

I acknowledge that every member must protect and be protected, advise and be advised in order to prevent the tragedy that has devastated our country and all of its people.

I also accept to fight against enemies of Rwanda wherever they may be.

I also swear before these members that I will strictly follow all current and future rules set forth by the RPF.

I will avoid making mistakes, being unfaithful, procrastination, and other errors that led our country into the abyss.

Fellow members gathered here, if I behave in an unworthy manner or do things that are contrary to our principles, goals and rules, I will have betrayed every Rwandan and I must therefore be punished like any criminal.

After every soldier in attendance recited the pledge, a loud speaker blasted a military march. The aid spoke again. "We will now make the following promotions." Over the next thirty minutes, 138 names were read out loud, among whom were Major Bidago and Lieutenants Kwizera, Mwiza, Ruhinda, and Kabanda.

As the multitude cleared the parade ground, the major collected his staff together. He shook the hand of each officer, then announced to all, "Our first meeting will commence in two hours. Report to the supply officer to pick up a pen and a notebook."

At the appointed time, Victor assembled under an acacia tree with the cadre of his battalion. As Personnel Officer, Victor's task was to maintain the records of the four hundred men and officers of his battalion. There was no need to keep finance records, since military volunteers did not receive a wage.

In addition to managing its own troops, Victor's unit would conduct interviews with local civilians and prisoners to determine their disposition. All would be issued fresh identification cards. The tripart designation—Hutu, Tutsi or Twa—was purposely omitted. After sixty years of racial division the *Ubokwo*—Rwandan ID card—did not include a tribe identifier.

Victor's unit would also carry out graves registration for those soldiers killed in action. An older man joined the cadre under the tree. Mzee Pierre Gahutu was a professional photographer. His main duty would be in processing ID photos.

As he closed out the meeting, the major encouraged his staff, "We must learn to share the challenges that come our way. That way our problems will be cut in half."

Always instant with a proverb, Victor added the Rwandan version of those words, "Yes, a stone that is visible cannot destroy a hoe."

When Victor finally returned to his unit, Mwiza was busy supervising the construction of their shelter, Bernice was organizing boxes of paper records, and Sano already had his hands full instructing local village leaders. All this was being accomplished well after dark in the beam of requisitioned vehicle headlights. In the spirit of their RPF pledge, every soldier was busy helping the other; building, carrying, or record-keeping. No one was idle.

The RPF rulebook was strict indeed. There would be no laziness, drunkenness, bribery, or carousing with women. Uniforms and bearing were always to be sharp and interaction with civilians must be polite. A group of political officers—commissars—mingled with the troops to encourage, educate, and enforce this high standard of discipline.

On the first day of operation, eight hundred Rwandese passed through Station Three. Most were villagers whom soldiers forcibly relocated into Uganda north of the Muvumba river. A dozen young men were recruits and another dozen were professional volunteers. Criminals were a challenge to deal with. Victor pondered, "How do we separate victims from perpetrators? No Rwandan mama would ever hand over her husband or son as a killer."

Through trial and error, he discovered the easiest method was to interview victims of obvious violence, those few who were attacked but survived. These witnesses could identify leaders of Hutu Power and those who did their bloody bidding.

Every few days Station Three would pull up stakes and move south along the Kayonza-Kagitumbo highway, always a few kilometers behind the battle line. Near an intersection not far from the town of Nyagarare, Victor spotted a bus which was being escorted by two UN vehicles. The caravan paused at his post to resupply with water.

Sano spoke to the French soldiers in blue UN helmets. He learned they were travelling throughout eastern Rwanda removing all *buzungu*—white people—in order to concentrate them at the Kigali airport then fly them out of the country. One distraught Swedish nurse approached Sano. She burst into tears as she explained how her best friend, *a very competent Rwandan aide*, was refused entry into the bus. "They struck her with the butt of a rifle," she sobbed. "My friend wailed, 'Kill me now with a bullet. Please, I beg you. That's better than to be raped and hacked by the gangsters that are waiting just outside these walls.'"

Victor reported these words to Major Bidogo who authorized a platoon of twenty reserve soldiers to race down the road to the rural hospital. Mwiza accompanied this contingent.

In the afternoon, the platoon returned with eight bedraggled prisoners at rifle point. Victor noted all were blood-stained and wearing bizarre outfits. One wore a blue wig. He

surmised they were *Interahamwe*, a paramilitary gang of young thugs organized by Hutu Power to kill Tutsis.

Just before dark Mwiza returned to Station Three. Victor asked, “So what did you find?”

With a troubled face, Mwiza began. “The hospital was not too far down the road, but we were too late. We found fifty or sixty fresh corpses—still warm. Most lay inside the hospital walls, hacked by machetes or clubbed by the *masu*—the one with nails. We saw some blown apart by grenades and some run through with spears; men, women, children, some in medical bandages. We saw hands and legs severed, brains smashed with hammers, private parts sliced off, and women stripped naked violated with beer bottles. We might have killed a dozen of the attackers as they ran into the bush. Only one of us was wounded, thank God. We managed to rescue three survivors who will testify against these devils.” He paused, then continued, “Now I know why I’m fighting—to stop this hell on earth.”

After an hour, Victor heard distant rifle fire. Mwiza counted the rounds. “Yes, eight shots for eight murderers. Justice can be swift when guilt is certain.”

The hour grew late, but Victor could not sleep. He switched on his transistor radio. BBC World Service was filled with reports from Rwanda. In just five days, forty thousand people in Kigali had perished. Many other familiar cities were named with corresponding death counts. The BBC described his RPF-Inkotanyi as *Ugandan*, *outsider*, and *invader*. The RPF was vilified for refusing a French offer to cease fire.

“How could we do that?” he muttered to himself. “Can you have a cease fire without a corresponding *cease murder*? Doesn’t that just give Hutu Power more days to slaughter more Tutsi innocents? I guess they don’t know the words of our pledge ‘Without delay. Always advance.’”

Victor yielded to temptation and turned the dial to RTLM radio. For a while he grooved to the African rock music. He strained to understand the fast-paced words of Simon Bikindi as he described Tutsis as: *umuzimu utera aturutse ishyanga*—“a spirit that attacks from a foreign place.”

Then the racist hype broke in—pure hate propaganda. Victor was aghast. He heard the word *Umuganga* which translates as *communal work*, something which villagers had performed for generations. As the commentators joked through their skits, he understood *clearing bush* now meant “killing men” and *pulling up the roots of the bad weeds* meant “killing women and children”. These were the orders emanating from RTLM radio. In short “All you Hutu, Do your work—*Umuganga*.”

The Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) continued their retrograde movement in the face of the relentless onslaught of the Inkotanyi. Victor heard many say the Hutu-Power government was so preoccupied with killing Tutsi civilians behind their lines, they neglected to engage the Tutsi army to their front. Perhaps it was so.

During their southward march, Victor and his comrades stumbled through the smoldering ruins of a small village just abandoned by FAR soldiers. Mutilated bodies filled the ditches,

recent kills on top, putrefying flesh on the bottom. In gastric distress Victor located the shattered shell of an outside toilet. Looking down into the fetid pit, he saw the remnant of a human face staring up at him. He staggered, slumped against a tree, and took in deep breaths.

Strewn corpses littered the main street. They appeared frozen in their final screams of agony. Females of all ages told a visual tale of rape and mutilation. Bernice choked back tears as she covered the exposed bodies of violated women. “How can these brutes claim to be human?”

Mwiza comforted the distraught Bernice, seating her on a bench. He then entered abandoned huts to flush out any remaining enemy. In the dark corners, rats and dogs feasted on human remains. Mwiza shot and killed one particularly vicious canine, then raced toward the fleeing enemy, rifle in hand, hoping to overtake at least one perpetrator of this outrage.

Sano seemed to exist in a world of his own. With pen in hand, he calmly counted bodies, sketched figures, and scribbled notes. *He will give this testimony in court someday*, Victor mused.

As Victor’s unit continued to advance south, their workload seemed to decrease. Many villagers were now escaping into the great Kagera jungle; others who were complicit in mass killings—already anticipating defeat—were fleeing into Tanzania.

After an evening meal and a few hours of catch-up work, Victor, Sano, Mwiza, and Bernice began to verbally process the day’s horror. Under a dim battery-powered lamp, Bernice spoke up first. “Please help me. I can’t hold it inside. I need to talk to someone about what my eyes saw today.”

Sano responded, “Yes, let’s help our sister; let’s help each other. If we are human at all, each of us is hurting inside.”

Mwiza spoke softly to Bernice, “I have seen much evil in my service as a soldier, but nothing compares to what I saw yesterday and especially today.”

Victor stammered, “The distorted face that caught me by surprise is burned into my mind. It will never leave me. I pray to God it might, but doubt it ever will. How can I ever look down a toilet again?” After a moment to recover his voice, he enquired, “Sano, you’re a man of God. If Imana exists at all, how do you explain this evil thing that surrounds us?”

“How can I explain to you the mystery of evil, when I don’t comprehend it myself? I was taught at seminary evil is not a *thing* at all, but the absence of a thing, the privation of the good. Maybe so. But like each of you, I cannot fathom how so many of my countrymen—most of them professing Christians—could transform themselves into such a pack of devils. I do understand this one thing. At the heart of our religion exists a savior, a God in human flesh, who suffered like the innocent dead we have witnessed today.”

Sano retrieved the rosary from his pocket and displayed the crucifix. “I worship this Christ-on-a-cross who knows firsthand the consequence of evil. Our Jesus Christ dripped real blood, as red as we saw today. He was scourged by wicked men and thrust through with a sharpened spear. He was displayed before a jeering crowd then died in agony—naked, humiliated, violated, friendless, drenched in his own blood; all this under the authority of a cruel

government. Does this story sound familiar? From the day that Cain killed Abel unto today, the world has been filled with continuous evil. The divine response to human wickedness has never been to send a divine explanation, but to send a divine being.

“But we are too close in time to think clearly about this human catastrophe. We still inhabit the horror. Please, my friends, give me space to meditate and pray. Maybe then God will grant me sufficient grace to talk with you about the evil that envelopes us.”

Bernice wept. “I will pray and meditate too. May God grant each of us strength to deal with the emotional trauma we suffered today and may He give this army the wisdom and ability needed to end this *genocide*.”

As each retreated into his private world, Victor repeated the final word spoken by Bernice in the French language: *génocide*. “Yes, that’s exactly what it is. And the organizers behind this crime are *génociders*.”

The next day, while marching past more devastation, the four lieutenants had further conversation. Mwiza opened this round of discussion. “I used to go to church, say my prayers, but now how can I believe? Look around you. How could a loving God allow such suffering?”

Sano took a deep breath and began his apologetic. “Forgive me ahead of time for my inadequate words. I searched for answers all night long. As a first step, I must tell you I am a sinner. I have done wicked things that shame me—cursing, stealing, fighting, abusing, cheating, and lying—things that God deplores, things that deserve His wrath. Yes, Sano Ruhinda is a great sinner. Now, I ask each of you to search deep inside your own soul. Have you discovered a sinful person inside of you?” Sano paused, as each acknowledged their sinfulness before God.

“This may shock you. I am no less guilty of sin than those eight prisoners who were executed a few days back. Yes, yes. The outworking of their sin—murder and rape—was clearly more criminal than anything I have ever done. Yet my heart on occasion has been just as black as theirs. At times my anger has been as murder; my lust as rape and my covetousness as looting. My soul held the evil desire, but I did not carry the thought into action.” He paused. “If you claim you have not sinned in this way then speak up now.” The three remained silent.

“So you ask, ‘Why did God create a world with evil in it?’

I might answer, ‘Because God chose to create a world with *you* in it?’

You may contend, ‘I think God could have created a world absent of suffering.’

I might respond, ‘Yes, God could have done that, but then He would have created a world void of human beings, because we all choose to sin.’

“And look around at this very moment while we are marching down the Kayonza-Kagitumbo highway. Turn your head to the right at the smoldering ruins; now to your left. What crimes lie moldering under that blue tarp? Don’t you recognize human sin as a greatest source of human misery?”

Bernice responded, “Okay Sano, I see your point. Still, I could not have done what these Interahamwe devils have done. Impossible.”

Sano agreed. “The Bernice who is talking with me now; The Bernice who was recently a school principal in Kampala; this Bernice could not be a genocider. But what if Bernice Kabanda

had been raised in an isolated Hutu village, illiterate, obedient to her tribal leader, poisoned with racist propaganda, could that Bernice have been an accomplice to murder? Do you think your own soul is so incorruptible?"

After a moment of reflection, he added, "As a Hutu, I am grateful I was out of the country when my father was murdered. Either I would have died defending him, or lived in shame compelled to be an accomplice."

Bernice and Mwiza spoke many words in whispered conversation. Friendship blossomed into affection. As Bernice gazed at the lush countryside, she was reminded of a beautiful woman, now pock-marked by obscene sores. She confided to Mwiza, "I have lived a sheltered life and have never seen death so close up. Tell me friend, have you seen this horror before?"

"Yes, my first time was in Gisenyi. I had just completed my second year at the National University and was home to visit my parents. Just as darkness fell, we heard shouts in the street then gunfire. My dad locked our doors and turned out the lights. That first night we were spared violence.

"The next morning a kind Hutu neighbor dropped by our house to warn us. We were on the Tutsi death list. My father and mother told me to escape into the bush, then return to university. My folks determined to stay behind, insisting they had enough money to bribe the local leaders."

His lip trembled. "Of course, they were among the three hundred murdered that night. I don't think this first slaughter was planned, but it did go unpunished. That's all the incentive the blood-thirsty killers needed. I knew my life was in jeopardy, so I decided to leave my homeland. I made it out of Gisenyi, but instead of returning to school, I walked west into Zaire. Along the route to the border post, I saw destruction like this—burned out huts and human bodies left like trash along the roadside. I wanted to avenge the murder of my parents and to end the madness in Rwanda so I infiltrated north to join the RPF."

After several more steps, Bernice posed a more personal question to Mwiza. "Is there anything you're afraid of if we confront enemy troops?"

"I'm not afraid to kill nor am I afraid to die. But maybe this: I'm not sure how I would stand up under torture. Will I be brave? Will I be a coward and beg? I pray that I could take death like a man and not lose courage." After a few breaths, he returned the question. "How about you? What is your greatest fear?"

"I think I'm like any woman in any war zone at any time in history. It's something you males don't face. I fear being raped, ravished, violated by multiple men. Death is preferred I think." Her voice trailed into a shudder.

Overhearing the talk, Victor joined in, "As long as we're sharing our fears, my greatest is pure physical pain. How would I respond to taunts and jabs? How would I bear up under real torture; deliberate cuts, burns, blows, not designed to kill, just to inflict agony; not for minutes, but maybe for days? God help me."

Sano spoke up, “Yes, it takes physical courage to run into battle and moral courage not to run in retreat. May God grant us grace if we ever do battle with the enemy.” He collected his thoughts. “I know you’re wondering what my greatest fear may be. Like each of you it’s how will I bear up under ridicule and torture. It’s hard for me to put my thoughts into words. Perhaps my greatest fear is this: that I lose compassion for my enemies.”

The drizzle turned into a deluge, stifling further talk. In defiance of the downpour, the marching soldiers broke into song. “Nothing will delay the Inkotanyi. Nothing will stop our forward march.”

The next morning while Victor was emersed in paperwork, Mwiza led in three captives at rifle point. Their wrists were bound with rope and their hands stained with blood. They reeked of banana beer. “We caught these killers red-handed. Look at their fingers. Now you can see where that term comes from—*red-handed*.” He cracked a grim grin. “This young one seems talkative. Do you want to interrogate him?”

Mwiza forced the three to squat under a tree, then spoke to Victor in hushed tones about the circumstance of their capture.

Victor shook his head in disbelief. He then addressed the youth. “If you talk to me, I may be able to spare your life. What can I call you?”

“My name’s on the ID in your pocket. I am Prosper Mukiza.”

The elder of the three—who seemed to be their leader—screamed at him. “Don’t speak another word to this cockroach!”

Mwiza struck him in the face with his rifle butt. “If you interrupt again, your worthless life will end under this tree.”

Victor addressed Prosper. “The lieutenant here says he caught you and your friends while you were hacking a family with machetes. He says you were having some kind of contest. Maybe you were seeing who could chop off a body part with just one swing. Is that right?”

Prosper fell silent, finally responding, “The decision to kill was not my idea. It came from the organizers. They gave me orders. I refused to join the butchery at first, but it was easier to swing the machete than to be stabbed by ridicule and contempt. That’s the truth.”

Victor asked, “How long has this killing been going on?”

“On the morning after Habyarimana died, the young men in my village gathered on the soccer field. Our mayor told us the Tutsi were responsible for the president’s death and all Tutsi were our mortal enemy. It was ‘kill them or they will kill us.’ He said it was our work—*Umuganga*—as Hutu patriots to cleanse the earth of its cockroach farmers. So, many of my friends went out hunting as if it were a sport. They no longer saw our neighbors as human beings but as vermin to be exterminated. Because I showed reluctance, the mayor required me to demonstrate loyalty by participating in a ritual murder. I was given a panga—long knife—and commanded to stab a pregnant mama in the belly. It was difficult, but the crowd egged me on. That was my first murder—rather, a double murder. I could not believe what I had done.

“The next morning, I was ordered to hunt Tutsi with the others. I had my panga to slice. Others had machetes to hack. Even young boys ran alongside us with sticks. If we encountered stout resistance, the local police would join us with guns and grenades. The first hunt was tough for me, but then it became easier. We began the day by killing; we ended it by looting. I learned if I killed a Tutsi, I had first claim on his property. I collected three radios, two bicycles, and this set of new clothes you see on my body. I am ashamed to be wearing it.”

The second youth spoke up, “Did you know that two Sundays ago was Easter? I sang in the choir that morning. Two Tutsi friends sang in the celebration next to me. They were schoolmates. The next day was Monday and on Tuesday the president’s jet fell from the sky. On Wednesday, this old man sitting next to me hacked my schoolmates to death.”

The accused shouted, “That’s a lie. I was helping to protect the Tutsis.”

Mwiza lifted his rifle and the protester closed his bleeding mouth.

The second youth continued. “I confess. I did what I did. I had lived with Tutsi friends without noticing it. Then I became contaminated with racial hatred without noticing it. But what is my defense? My priest, the man who baptized me as a baby, he condoned the killing. He said it was God’s will. Tell me. How could I resist God?”

Victor had heard enough. The three remained tied to the tree until dark when Mwiza informed Victor, “It’s time I escort these prisoners into their new home”. With the assistance of a few enlisted soldiers, the killers were led away.

After several minutes, Victor heard a single rifle shot. “One out of three.” He remembered Mwiza’s words: “Justice can be swift when guilt is certain.”

On April 16<sup>th</sup>, the entire army wheeled west toward Kigali. Word filtered through the camp that the RPF strategy was now to move with force upon the capital city. After only one week of existence, his unit was reorganizing. Victor wanted to preserve the moment for posterity so he asked Mzee Pierre Gahutu to take a photo of the four lieutenants. Victor, Sano, Mwiza, and Bernice posed by their shelter with an RPF flag as background. Pierre snapped the picture and gave a copy to each officer. Mwiza and Bernice appeared side by side a shy smile upon each face.

One day before new orders were to be cut for Third Battalion, the FAR staged a fierce counter attack against the Inkotanyi. Enemy artillery exploded behind the lines. A dozen soldiers perished in the withering fire. Victor’s unit had one last function to perform before reorganization: graves registration. The duty fell upon Bernice to visit the mobile hospital to identify the dead and dying. The school-teacher-turned-army-officer burst into tears when she drew back a tarp and saw the tattered body of her dear friend, Lieutenant Francis Mwiza.

## Chapter 3

### Spiritual Wickedness in High Places

April 1994—in Gabiro, Rwanda, and the Kagera Jungle

The three lieutenants gathered at the side of their fallen comrade, Francis Mwiza. The grim mask of death, hitherto familiar but impersonal, now settled upon the face of their friend. Each grieved the loss in their own way. Victor brooded; Sano prayed; Bernice wept. Major Bidogo permitted the body to be interred in a local church yard, well-marked for possible re-burial. Bernice carried out her duty as registrar of graves. Tucked inside her friend's shirt, she discovered the recent photo displaying Mwiza and herself standing side by side. She pressed the picture to her lips before she re-tucked it and sealed it inside his body bag.

As the military action shifted west toward Kigali, Victor and Bernice moved on with the Inkotanyi army. The Rwanda Patriotic Front de-commissioned Lieutenant Sano Ruhinda as a chaplain and appointed him temporary magistrate of the now-liberated town of Gabiro. He would assume the chair of his martyred father. The priest-in-training dispatched a letter to the Catholic University of Belgium asking his superior for a dispensation to fill this position until order could be restored in Byumba Province.

Sano was assigned a body guard of twenty armed troops who claimed as home the northeast corner of Rwanda. These soldiers would serve as a constabulary police force. The next morning, the new magistrate headed north in a convoy along the Eastern Highway. For although Hutu Power had been crushed in the eastern provinces, it had not yet been eradicated. Gangs of thugs still roamed the countryside, especially in the vast jungle of Kagera.

The daylong journey to Gabiro proved uneventful. The troops dismantled a few makeshift roadblocks and fired a few rounds at fleeing marauders. A contingent of Inkotanyi soldiers greeted the convoy outside of town and escorted Sano to the city hall of Gabiro. Battle smoke had lifted, but widespread destruction and stench still clung to a town in ruin. The new mayor's first act was to incarcerate about a dozen of the most notorious génociders, locking them in a local school house.

The population was in flux. As surviving victims straggled into their looted homes, authors of the bloodlust crept into the bush. Chief among the alleged perpetrators was a parish priest by the name of Father Silas Zagabe.

Mayor Ruhinda gathered together the town leaders to dictate occupation rules. Any citizen carrying a firearm would be arrested. Anyone resisting arrest would be shot. Racist talk and behavior would not be tolerated. A curfew would remain in place from dawn to dusk. No one was to depart town limits without an official pass.

Sano located a trusted schoolmate named Dennis and a friend of his father named François. He spoke with these two in private and pieced together the degeneration of his mentor Father Silas.

Sano learned that just after he had left for Belgium in 1991, the gentle priest began a descent into spiritual wickedness. Whether coopted or coerced, he came to embrace the ideology of Hutu Power. His allegiance was no longer to his God and church, but had shifted to his rulers and tribe.

At the direction of the government, Father Silas compiled a list of Tutsi parishioners and tracked their movements. He stood by as an outspoken deacon was attacked and murdered. He reported the intent of four young choir members who confessed their plan to cross the Ugandan frontier. The youths were found chopped to pieces the next morning.

Dennis related to Sano how his father had died on Christmas Day. “We all urged him to go into the forest, but he replied, ‘How can I do that? I’m mayor of this city and the last voice of reason among our leaders.’ The odd thing was how these purveyors of death projected their own evil deeds upon the heads of their opponents. It was like a mirror.

“Father Silas actually accused your father of spreading racial hatred and supporting militia killers. I overheard this supposed man-of-God say to him at one of the rallies, ‘As a Hutu yourself, you are a traitor to your tribe. It’s not my fault if local youth rise up against you. They despise you and I cannot control their actions.’

“As your father departed morning mass on Christmas Day, he was accosted by a dozen youth near your home. Upon orders from the priest, his body was not mutilated and he was granted burial in the church cemetery. With the moderating voice of your father gone, the situation in Gabiro deteriorated. A Tutsi corpse was found in the street nearly every morning.

“On Easter Sunday, I joined the celebration of Christ’s resurrection. I partook of the eucharist with a few of the remaining Tutsis. Two days later when Habyarimana died, Satan took command in Gabiro and Father Silas rose to become a champion of his cause.

“Madness gripped the entire Hutu population. Young men hunted their neighbors as jackals hunt rabbits. With the connivance of the priest, hundreds of terrified Tutsis sought refuge within the walls of Saint Sabastian. When the building was packed to bursting, the priest himself unlocked the doors and directed the *work* of Interehamwe gangsters. Men, women, and children were butchered inside the church and on parish grounds. You know about one-quarter of Gabiro was Tutsi. They are all gone—one-hundred percent. Many fled to the jungle, but most are in graves or in rotting piles beyond the toilets.”

As this sad story drew to a close, Sano asked, “Does anyone know the whereabouts of Father Silas?”

François answered, “We think he is hiding near his mother’s home in the jungle, biding his time, hoping for an opportunity to return to his post.”

With tear-stained face, Sano then requested, “Please take me to my father’s grave.”

In somber procession, he followed his friends to a corner of the Saint Sabastian cemetery. Encompassed by stones, the small plot presented an inscription carved upon a wooden plank: “Damascene Habimana 1940-1993”.

Sano knelt and recited a prayer for the dead. “Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.”

After several minutes of silence, Dennis broke in. “I’m glad your father was buried here and not left to the dogs. I am also grateful his body was not desecrated like so many others. Father Silas boasted about his intervention as if it were an act of virtue. Tell me. Does that single act of decency exonerate the guilt of his crimes?”

Rain began to gush from the sky and the men sought shelter under the roof of the church. François quietly spoke. “Forgive us. We’ve had no opportunity to clean this place since the slaughter.”

As Sano glanced about the sacred space—so integral to his up-bringing—he wept at the desecration. Blood still encrusted pews and splattered walls. Even the Blessed Virgin on her high perch was flecked with blood. Gouges from knives and holes from bullets violated the altar. All items of value had been ripped away as booty. Sano asked about the headless statues.

“Yes,” said Dennis, “They practiced their technique on the saints. They tell me Father Silas hid the head of Saint Sabastian, but I don’t know where it is.”

Sano studied the disfigured image. “That could have been me, if I had remained in Gibaro. You may not know this, but my religious name is *Sabastian*.”

“Tomorrow is Sunday. I’m not a priest so I can’t celebrate mass, but I’d like to give a homily, not as Mayor Sano but as Brother Sabastian. Please get the word out to the parish. I will be here at ten.”

After a night of rain, the morning broke bright and clear. As Brother Sabastian walked through the doors of Saint Sabastian, he displayed a white vestment salvaged from the church closet as well as his own scapular now visible on the outside of his shirt.

He marveled at the interior transformation. Debris was gone; the floor was swept; and much of the blood had been scrubbed away.

Old François explained, “We gathered together as many as we could. They brought their brooms, buckets, and rags. I’m astonished at what ten people working for ten hours can accomplish. A few of your soldiers were a great help.”

Brother Sabastian glanced at the torso of Saint Sabastian.

Dennis smiled, “That was my son’s idea. Your namesake has a head again, even if it’s a whitewashed soccer ball.”

By ten o’clock, thirty townfolk had gathered in the church. Brother Sabastian recognized most of the faces and knew them to be Hutu. He saw only three Tutsi parishioners shuffling near a side exit. He beckoned them forward saying, “Our Father in heaven recognizes only one race of people; that is the human race without distinction and without preference. We must learn again to sit together in harmony.”

His brief homily concerned the three cardinal virtues: faith, love, and hope. He urged his hurting flock to remain faithful to God in spite of their suffering, to keep Christ upon the throne

of their hearts, and not to reject the Church because certain priests proved to be unworthy of their calling.

He then encouraged his listeners to love every neighbor in spite of past prejudices and recent wrongs. He added, “But remember, Christian love does not preclude justice. Our loving God is also a just God. As a nation, the challenge ahead is to balance love and justice into something called *reconciliation*. This road before us will take more courage and forgiveness than I can imagine. Still, we must look ahead of us and not behind.”

Brother Sabastian emphasized hope as the most critical virtue for the current situation. “Hope is the anchor of the soul. Remain hopeful that your life will improve, that time will turn your wounds into scars. During these impossible times, cling to the hope that the depth of evil has been plumbed and the only direction is upward toward heaven.”

He concluded his homily by speaking about grace. “These are the words that Saint Peter spoke to the scattered church during a time of persecution: ‘May the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, restore you and make you strong.’”

As the group began to rise, Brother Sabastian dismounted the platform. “Please neighbors, remain seated,” he said in a loud voice. “I now want to address you as the mayor of Gabiro and not as Brother Sabastian.” He removed his vestment and placed his scapular under his shirt.

As they re-settled in their places, he spoke on. “I am sad to say that some of you sitting before me are criminals. You know this fact and so does God, even if I am ignorant of it. Your Christian duty is to confess your sins and pay society for your crimes. In the days and years to come you will be held accountable for your deeds.

“Some of you are innocent victims. I am so sorry for your losses and suffering. Your duty is not to seek revenge but to seek refuge in God. I promise I will do all I can to work for justice within the limits of law.

“Some of you stood by and did nothing when your neighbors were killed. You did not speak up and you will have to live with that guilt.

“You have all survived a refiner’s fire. May your souls emerge as purified gold not as spoiled dross and may you walk out of Saint Sebastian resolved to do the right thing.”

The people were subdued as they exited the church. Some wondered if the fire ahead might refine the soul as much as the fire behind.

The next day, Sano announced to the new city council. “I want to meet with Father Silas as a peacemaker. I think it’s important.” Sano asked François to locate the run-away priest and the old man returned the same day with news that his mentor would welcome a parley of reconciliation. Silas pledged no harm would come to his one-time protégée.

Sano left the next morning, taking along Dennis and François as witnesses. Four soldiers accompanied them to a crossroad not far from Silas’ boyhood home. Sano then proceeded on foot up a hillside path, now cascading with rain water. The three peacemakers felt the gaze of

spying eyes as they trudged through dense foliage. Suddenly, four whooping warriors rushed to confront them. As the gang menaced and swung machetes, a man shouted from behind, “These are my friends. Show some respect.” Sano recognized the resonant voice as that of Father Silas.

As their eyes locked, Sano observed a short, rotund, jovial man, more weathered than he had remembered, but still the priest of his youth. The four ruffians melted into the forest while Silas led his guests through the bush.

“François! Dennis! I’m so glad to see you’ve survived this war. I’ve been praying for your safety every day. And little Sano – or should I say *Sabastian* – I am so glad we can meet and clear up our misunderstandings. I’m ready to get back to work, you know.”

The chirpy words and jaunty demeanor seemed wildly inappropriate. Silas jabbered on about the *good old days before the Ugandan enemy invaded our homeland*. Sano, Dennis, and François held their tongues. They noted the ominous reappearance of the body guard, as they entered the home of Silas.

“You remember my mama, right?” A toothless old lady grinned at the visitors. Silas continued, “Please sit around my humble table and enjoy a glass of Primus Beer.” The old lady filled four tumblers. “Now, tell me. How can I help you bring peace to Gibaro? You know I have some influence in town.”

Sano finally spoke, “Yes, I know you are a man of great influence. My question to you is this: ‘Up to now, how have you been using your influence? Has it been to promote the gospel of Christ and the welfare of His flock?’”

Silas assumed an insulted posture. “I have kept my solemn vows if that’s what you mean. I have never disobeyed Bishop Misago and have never broken a law of the Rwandan Republic. My conscience is crystal clear on these matters.”

Sano replied, “I am happy to hear that. You are the person who inspired me to the priesthood. Since the days I served as altar boy, you have served as an example of what a priest should be.”

A wide smile broke on Silas’ face.

Sano continued, “Since you are certain of your loyalty to the church and your innocence before God, I expect you’re prepared to travel with me back to Gibaro.”

The smile vanished. “It’s not that simple. I have many false accusers, just like Our Lord had them. If I return with you, my enemies may try to crucify me for crimes I never committed, especially those *cockroaches*.” He retrieved that last word. “I mean *our Tutsi brothers*.”

François entered the conversation. “Old friend, it may be true that you followed the lead of your bishop in Kigali and upheld the rule of your Hutu masters, but your religion was corrupt and your politics evil to the core. I myself repent for being a coward in the face of so great an evil, but I know exactly what my eyes saw and my ears heard.”

Silas burst in, “All rumors and lies. I stood up for everyone in my parish and tried my best to protect Tutsis from the killers.”

Dennis could not hold back his indignation. “You are in one-hundred percent denial. I heard your speeches at the rallies! I watched you as you unlocked the big doors to the church! How can you say you are not guilty of the crimes that followed?”

Silas protested, “They forced me to do those things. I was under threat of death myself. How could I resist?”

“Sano, listen to me. I did not want your father dead. I did my best to protect him. When I learned he was killed, I rescued his body and gave him a Christian burial. Did they tell you that?”

Sano answered, “Yes, François and Dennis have told me many things about your conduct over the last few years. I didn’t believe the stories at first, but I heard the same words from the mouths of a dozen witnesses. I know what has happened in my country and my heart is broken. No one can deceive me.”

For thirty minutes Sano then recounted his two-week experience in Rwanda to include the floating bodies that welcomed him, the hospital grounds ravaged by Interahamwe, and especially the massacre of villagers at the roadside. “I witnessed this carnage first hand. I took notes. I counted ninety-eight bodies – women and children all chopped with machetes.

“Silas, the Rwanda Patriotic Army only carries rifles, never machetes. I am certain that the cutting I witnessed was not the result of a war between two armies, but a genocide perpetrated by one tribe upon another.”

“It was war,” Silas insisted in agitation. “I did what I could to survive it. I’m not ashamed”

Sano stood to his feet. “It’s getting dark. We need to return to the crossroads. Father Silas, please come back with us. I promise you will get a fair trial and justice will be done. I’ll stand at your side if you wish.”

The pastoral demeanor of Silas returned. “My son, I need time to think this over. I promise to give you my answer in a few days. Until then, I will be praying for the situation. Say, Sano, are you still reciting the rosary? Please pray for me.”

With that, the three peacemakers exited the home shaking their heads. Once out the door, Dennis muttered, “What did we just witness? Fantasy? Delusion?”

Sano grumbled, “I wanted to confront that deceiver, but how could I do that when he is in complete denial?”

François provided a different interpretation. “I think it was all theater. Father Silas is scheming. He was practicing his defense for the day when he must defend the indefensible.”

When they arrived at the forest foot path, Sano glanced back to see Silas gesturing to his body guards.

“I don’t trust him. Dennis, you’re a good runner. Sprint as fast as you can back to the soldiers and tell them what happened. François is old and I’m no good at running. We’ll head deeper into the jungle. Go now!”

As Dennis ran toward the road, Sano and François pivoted into the darkening jungle. After twenty quick paces, they crept behind a tall tree and remained still. The two heard the

splashing footfalls of the four killers as they raced away from them. Then they continued down the winding road until dimness halted further movement.

François collected a few large branches and leaned them against a tree. In this miserable shelter, the two huddled together to brave a rainy night. They saw – or imagined they saw – a dim light pass their hidden position.

After nine hours of profound darkness and muted heavenly petitions, the two stumbled back onto the muddy path heading east, deeper into the Kagere Jungle. Relentless rain bogged their feet, limited their vision, and played tricks with their ears.

Sano quired François, “Should we go on? What do you think?”

“I’ve been down this path once or twice. Did you notice the sign of the snake, those wavy lines carved into tree trunks? They say this land is haunted. A sorceress is reputed to live nearby with power to heal, cast spells, and tell the future.”

Sano let loose an involuntary laugh. “And you believe that?”

François saw no humor in the statement. “This is what people tell me. A traditional healer named Zura inhabits these woods. My mother spoke of this Pigmy woman even when I was a boy—and that’s fifty years ago. Some villagers still seek out this ancient woman for potions and advice.”

Sano rejoined, “Believe me, I’m more afraid of the killers behind us than the sorcery ahead. Let’s keep moving.”

Soon a bright sun filtered through the canopy. A teenager peddled past them on an unsteady bicycle. The boy paused to gaze backward, then continued at double speed down the path.

“I don’t like the looks of this,” said Sano. “Let’s hurry to see if we can find refuge somewhere.”

“I like this situation even less than you,” responded François. “Did you see the ghosts?”

Sano shot him a sideways glance, “Ghosts?”

“Yep, just up ahead, to the sides of the hilltop.”

When they attained the crest, the pair peered back down the path to see distant killers jogging with machetes in hand.

Suddenly two *ghosts* darted from the woods, covered from head to toe in some kind of white powder. “Please, come with us. We’ll take you to Mama Zura.” A third ghost sprinted toward the killers screaming and dancing. A fourth ghost blew on a cow’s horn. At once, the air was filled with beating drums and terrible shrieks. Sano and François clung to the ghosts as they glided through dense underbrush.

One of the ghosts whispered to Sano, “They are frightened away for now. Don’t worry.”

Soon the group approached a clearing. On the far side Sano spotted a sturdy stone building. Robed in crimson and festooned with bangles, a squat woman of ancient visage stood outside the doorway. Zura grabbed each by the arms saying, “Welcome Sano. Welcome François.”

Sano whirled in a complete circle, taking in the cultic symbols of skull, snake, and lightning bolt. One of the ghosts began mopping his face, removing a dusting of cassava flour. “Do you recognize me now?”

Sano stared in bewilderment. A spark of recognition emerged from his tongue. “You’re – You’re little Willy.”

The lanky man grinned, “That’s me.”

François looked into the man’s face. “We thought you were dead.”

“Almost,” Willy said. “Zura here rescued me. Not just me, but all those you see around you. She’s a remarkable lady.”

Still confused, Sano retorted, “What? How?”

“You are not the first to run down this muddy path. Since the death of Habyarimana three weeks ago, hundreds of Tutsis have fled into this jungle. Most were caught and killed—many by the same group that chased you. After I reached this house, you won’t believe what happened next.

“I was trembling like a little girl, but Zura confronted the Interahamwe who were rushing after me. She shook her bracelets at them and shouted, ‘You all know that I am a witch doctor. I will send my ghosts after you if you enter my house. You will be digging your own graves.’”

Willy continued, “Are you aware that Zura knows all the medicines in this forest? She discovered a special powder that makes men itch. It irritates their skin.” Willy the ghost began laughing. “Zura put this powder on the sleeves of her robes, then flapped her arms as the killers entered her house. The intruders began to scratch their skin as Zura shrieked out, ‘I’m putting a curse on you right now.’ The militiamen ran from the property in horror, asking the witch doctor to show mercy.”

Zura chimed in, “I also called down the thunder of Nayabingi onto their heads. She is the goddess witch of my childhood. They scampered out the door in terror and have not returned.” She hesitated, “But maybe they’ll come back tomorrow.

“Sano,” she looked into his eyes. “You are a high-value target and the killers are thirsty for your blood.”

The group re-gathered in the parlor. Sano found a pen in his pocket and scribbled a note. Handing it to Willy, he instructed. “Hurry into town. Give this note to the police chief. I hope he can send my soldiers here tomorrow.”

Zura assigned a pigmy boy to accompany him. “Take Oscar with you. He can navigate these woods in the dark.” With family pride she added, “He inherited this gift from his great-great grandma.”

After the two departed, Sano quizzed his hostess about her unlikely calling as a rescuer of Tutsis.

“Yes, I never intended to shelter such a crowd, but what could I do when they came pouring through my door? I couldn’t turn them away.” Pointing to a corner blanket, her eyes welled with compassion. “See those tiny babies over there. They come from different mothers

who were murdered with these infants still clutched in their arms. Could I abandon them? And that little girl. She looks after them. Her mother was murdered too.”

François followed the dialogue in the quietness of profound thought. Finally, he spoke in a low voice. “Brother Sabastian, I have a spiritual question to ask you and I hope you will not be offended.”

“Speak on.”

“You know both Father Silas and now you know Mama Zura. Right? The father is an ordained Roman Catholic priest while this mama is a witch of the forest. Tell me then, why is it that Silas is a wicked man and Zura is a righteous woman? I don’t understand.”

“That’s an excellent question, my friend. I have no answer, but I have similar questions. Why did Simon Peter deny his Savior and Judas Iscariot betray his Lord? Why did a thief on the cross respond to Christ with respect and a persecutor from Tarsus spread His Gospel throughout the world? I don’t pretend to know. I can tell you this. Father Silas Zagabe is a bad priest. He should be expelled from his church and imprisoned by his country. Mama Zura is a saintly witch. I don’t understand it, but from where I stand right now, she deserves heaven and he has earned a place in hell. But I am not God and the verdict is not mine.”

After dark, one of the boys kept watch outside with a whistle in his hand. A quiet tweet meant silence and a sharp trill meant run through the back door. The conversation inside continued until two candles had burned themselves out.

The night was rainy and whistle-less. Sleepers avoided the spots where water dripped to the wooden floor. Sano could not sleep, instead reciting his rosary. He sensed something big would be happening the next day and prayed for courage to face it.

A whistle tooted just after daylight. House dwellers quickly donned their bits of clothing. The smallest refugees hid under floorboards and in cabinets. Through a morning mist, Sano viewed a dozen men walking toward the front door. A man garbed in vestments positioned himself in the rear.

A few rocks then pelted the windows. “Listen up!” a rough voice shouted out. “We know Sano Ruhinda is in there with you. We want to talk with him. We won’t harm the rest of you if you send him out.” As if to make the point emphatic, a burst of automatic rifle fire shot through the door. “Yes, we have guns this time and if Sano does not come out in one minute, we promise to kill everyone inside.”

François spoke to Sano, “You know they will kill us all anyway. They can’t leave any witness to your murder.”

“I believe your right,” said Sano. “Still, I have no choice. I must put my trust in God.”

Zura rushed out the front door. She shook her fist and rattled bracelets. “I put the curse of Nayabingi on your heads.”

A few in the crowd trembled and staggered backward. Then a priestly voice spoke out. “That old lady is full of baboon dung. I speak from authority. There is no witch in this forest just as there is no God in heaven. Only the strong survive and we embody Hutu Power!”

Another burst of gunfire ricocheted off the stones. “Come out now, Sano. Your time is up. The graves are only half full.”

The door flung open and Brother Sabastian paced into the open yard. Zura stepped backward bracing against the wall.

One voice shouted, “Let’s slice him to pieces now.”

Another said, “No, let’s play with him first. I want to see if a witch or a god will come to his rescue.”

A third shouted, “Let me slice his ankles. I want to make him crawl like the insect he is.”

Inside a circle of taunts, the gang beat him with clubs. They turned him upon his belly with one attacker forcing a foot into the small of his back.

“Watch this,” bellowed a big man. “This is the right way to do the job,”

He then surgically sliced the Achilles tendon above each foot. “Now pick him up under his arms and set him on his feet. You’ll get a kick out of this.”

Once upright, Sano teetered forward upon his face, the soles of his feet still planted on the ground. The crowd roared and jeered as Sano writhed in pain.

A voice from the rear shouted, “It’s time for this Hutu traitor to die. All of you, each one, must take a hack with a machete. I am watching and if you don’t chop, you yourself will be chopped.”

With Sano now flung to his back, the big man swung a machete at his throat. Blood spurted in all directions. “Hurrah!” the killing circle shouted. A second man raised a long knife above his head.

A rifle shot rang from a distance and the long knife dropped to the ground. Another shot felled a second killer, then a third. The Inkotanyi in full force was racing toward the killing squad, but Sano was too far gone to notice their arrival.