

Rwandese Flowers

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Preface

Although this book is based on the genocide of 1994 that occurred in a small African country named Rwanda, its story is a figment of my imagination. It covers mainly the period from 1993 to 1994, in which its actions spread all over the provinces. Even so, an indirect historic nature brings to this book a close relation between fiction and reality.

A few real-life authorities appear in this fiction just because of their historical value. However, they are in imaginary context. The whole account flows in first and third-person narratives alternately, and some African expressions are in their original spelling just to keep the environment as genuine as possible.

"Captain, what shall we do with all those prisoners?"
"Who is responsible for moving supplies, Lieutenant Ota Uwiragiye?"
"It's usually my role to do this, sir."
"Have you stocked food for the unforeseen?"
"No, I'm sorry, Skipper."
"Didn't you expect all this to happen?"
"Unluckily, I didn't, sir."
"Why not?"
"I did not imagine we would make so many captures."
"Don't you trust your leader?"
"Yes, I do, but I didn't guess things would come to that much."
"Will the meal of their troop last forever?"
"I guess not."
"Do we have enough money to buy grub for all these convicts?"
"I'm afraid more is needed, sir."
"Do you intend to loot a farm to feed them?"
"No, I don't, Captain."
"Do you feel sorry for that kind of people?"
"No, absolutely not."
"So, kill them all!"
In minutes, Lieutenant Ota Uwiragiye formed a big firing squad and ordered:
"Fire!"

I - 2004 – RWANDA REMEMBERS THE DEAD

On the morning of April 6, 2004, I was once again in Rwanda, a small sovereign Republic of Central Africa, which borders Uganda to the north, Burundi to the south, Congo (formerly Zaire) to the west and Tanzania to the east. It was the second time I visited it and, on that occasion, with the aim of overcoming some traumas resulting from my first passage ten years earlier. It would be an emancipating experience, and it required great courage for me to return. Paradoxically, nobody can put back the clock of history because most things time cannot mend. Thus, I was going to revive an epoch full of unpleasant memories and inevitable consequences that had marked me deeply, taught me some valuable truths about life and were still hanging on my mind.

In 1994, when I left Africa for the first time, my father, an American senator, took me to a family's long-standing therapist in the United States of America. This professional suggested I visit Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. I did not believe I was troubled enough to need any psychological assistance to be happy. However, since Father wanted me to get therapy, I responded positively to his wish because as his daughter, I loved him and felt pleased when he approved what I was doing.

The government of President Paul Kagame organized a weeklong event during April 7-13, 2004 to remember the ten years of the Rwandan Genocide that occurred from April 6 to July 10, 1994. It was a social catastrophe due to the mass slaughter of ethnic Tutsis in most cases, and moderate Hutus. The Hutus with whom they lived together in the country perpetrated the massacre hand-to-hand during violent and bloody actions. Close to eight hundred thousand people died over one hundred days. These numbers are similar to the death toll of the roughly four years of the Civil War that claimed the lives of about three percent of the US citizens.

My psychoanalyst thought it was the right opportunity for me to face the unresolved issues from the past. At first, I refused, yet he convinced me with the argument that many days had already passed since the incident, and we had been working on my emotional for too long. Under his reasoning, I was ready to deal with all that. Why would I reopen old wounds if I had already gotten over the unpleasant memories? Were they still disturbing me as strongly as that? It was not rational.

"Isabelle, if you attend the event in Kigali and return well, I will know that Rwanda is water under the bridge, and therefore, I say to your father that you no longer need my help, and we can end our analysis sessions."

"Do you swear? Please God!"

Getting rid of my tedious friend was a priceless reward. Then, I put it all in two pans of a balance, weighing up the two possibilities: the wrong choice on one side, and the missing of a good one on the other, and I made up my mind to visit Central Africa for the second time.

Three ethnic groups live in Rwanda: the Hutus, who form the majority, make up eighty-five percent of the population, the Twas, less than one percent, and the Tutsis, more or less fourteen percent. The Twas were the first settlers to reach the mountainous region of present-day Rwanda, around the sixth century BC. In sequence, the Hutus arrived in the mid sixth century AD, and, finally, about one hundred years later, the first Tutsis got there. The Twas communicate with one another in Rukiga, their original language, although they also use Kinyarwanda, English, and French as other Rwandans do.

In Rukiga, the prefixes MA and BA indicate singular and plural, respectively. The word Batwa (Twas) is plural of Matwa, Babutu of Mahutu and Batutsi of Matutsi. The terms Twas and Batwa (Rukiga plural) are synonyms, since they refer to more

than one individual as well as Twa and Matwa to one. The Twas are a Pygmy citizenry of small stature, average weight, and height about a meter and a half, who are indigenous to Central Africa and parts of Asia. Reports of their presence in the region go back to the time of the Egyptian Pharaohs.

At the early stage of the country's historical formation, the three ethnic groups – the Hutus, farmers, the Tutsis, herders, and the Twas, hunters, and collectors, coexisted in harmony until the Europeans colonized the region. The Brussels conference, in 1890, granted Rwanda to Germany. The Germans controlled the region until their defeat in World War I when the protectorate of Rwanda passed into the control of Belgium.

The Belgians divided the Rwandans into two major groups, adopting racial identification that instigated ethnic division. They approached the Tutsi minority to govern the country and discriminated the Hutus, what exacerbated the racial hatred.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Hutus took power, expelled the Belgians and massacred the Tutsis, who fled by thousands into exile in neighboring countries where they founded an armed resistance movement. Because of the death of nearly a million Tutsis, people see a parallel between the Rwandese Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis during the World War II.

After I arrived in Kigali and on the way from the Kanombe Airport to the *Hôtel des Mille Collines*, I did not see a single familiar face, since most people I met in 1994 died or fled the country. At first, I intended to leave Rwanda after seven days, as I had planned to be present during the full week, yet I changed my mind. I asked the hotel manager to obtain a ticket for a flight on April 7 so that I left the country in the first phase of the event. I did not see any sense in staying in Kigali not even a tiny bit more than a couple of days. In fact, when I set foot in that place another time, I deduced I had nothing to do with it anymore, and I washed my hands of Rwanda. Furthermore, I thought I could meet the wishes of my clinical psychologist and the needs of my health care, spending just two days in Rwanda. Sadly, I was not hopeful of getting a flight available going to the West, since the city was replete with visitors of other nationalities who would also go by air. While I was walking around town, I saw sad people passing by me.

They looked like a sorry little girl who had thrown her doll on fire and could do little while the flames were consuming it. The next morning, once removing the ashes, she finds nothing more of her favorite toy apart from its memory. Therefore, she assumes a guilt that she carries with her from then on, for burning her doll, carelessly.

People were heading to the local football stadium where the main ceremony was to happen. Whoever survived Rwanda 1994 carries death as a burden on his memories or life as a gift for having escaped the clutches of the genocide. Therefore, many Rwandans credited their existence to a stroke of

luck, feeling as if they had died in the remembered year, and, after a decade, they were having a fresh start or mourning the anniversary of a sad story. People looked at one another and did not know whether they smiled because they were alive or wept for their dead.

My name is Isabelle, and I am an American doctor from New York and I have French ancestry. My grandparents migrated from France to the United States of America where Father was born. He is a nationalist politician who loves France maybe thanks to his parents' origin. The French Government, for its part, respects and honors him in gratitude for his support on the Franco-American business agenda.

Block after block, as I was walking down Kigali streets in 2004, I felt good to see that the inhabitants I came across did not recognize me. Amid the sad crowd, I feared to be unprepared for the recurrence of the past events, whispering to myself and cursing my psychologist for having sent me back to that place, blackmailing me with the achievement of my healing. Such being the case, I wondered why I did not keep the displeasing story with me, broke into the USA and affirmed to my shrink in New York that my difficult issues were gone, remained in the past and were currently resolved.

Sir, I go a little crazy, but I like myself this way. I do not need any of your services anymore. Please, leave me alone with my psychopathy!

I think I am a normal person, a sociable and responsive partner, although my mother used to say I was a temperamental, impetuous and brave girl who do not postpone what has to be done and that was going to be different from all the girls. I was born a hyperactive baby with an above average energy, and on that account, I naturally played sports when I grew older. Even so, only in wrestling and Olympic trap shooting, I excelled.

My father, who considered hunting one of his hobbies, taught me to handle guns. However, when I became aware that gunning down the defenseless migratory, game ducks by the wetlands of Missouri was cowardice, I joined a shooting school to compete against other human beings. Instead of slaughtering innocent birds, I began to break clay targets of eleven inches in diameter made of bitumen and limestone that tireless machines flung in the air. The damn mechanism launched 75 objects in a series of 25 that made me crazy. Notwithstanding they always overcame me, I broke numberless clay pigeons, and my coach sometimes said:

Oh, my God! You should miss some birds, Isabelle; otherwise, I lose my job for not having anything else to teach you. Hababa.

Father has friends in the military and in the US executive branch such as security professionals and snipers, who perform precision shots on targets at long distances. Realizing my ability, he introduced me to those men with whom I have trained over a lengthy period. Hitting a target one kilometer away is cool. They assessed me well, included me among the best and intended to take me to the Marines. On the contrary, my father did not accept.

You do not even dare to think about it! My daughter is sweet-tempered, and she will not shoot at humans in any futile war of yours. She does it for pleasure.

I had not been part of a target shooting team for long, since another obligation took almost all my days: my medicine course. The time had come in my life when I should make a difficult choice, and I either competed professionally or strove to become a physician. I discussed the subject with my parents, and they agreed I prioritized the studies, as the sport is something ephemeral and would last only as long as my youth and vitality persisted. Today, I am a good doctor. However whoever is at gunpoint of a weapon in my hand is in trouble if had done something wrong that leads me to pull the trigger at any distance I am. The grappling together with my impulsive temper made me tough. My father acquired the habit of taking me out of trouble at school, as I skirmished with the boys of my age. The girls, furthermore, found me different, although I am not that bad. I would get into disputes that often steered me toward the bureaus of the headmasters of educational establishments where I studied without any obstacles only because I was the daughter of an influential, political leader.

Upon walking through the city, I wondered that I should be enjoying a beautiful sunrise at the Central Park in New York, yet I was in Rwanda one more time after such a long absence. I passed by the Kigali Hospital Center, the CHK (Centre Hospitalier de Kigali) where I worked in 1994, and I saw the majestic podocarp across the street, a tree that filled my mind with delight, drawing a grin on my face. In the city center, Rwandans provided us good events such as performances of chants, poetry gatherings, plays, film screenings, and art exhibitions, which recalled the horror, but also celebrated the victory of life over death. Love and hope of a peaceful and prosperous future were the Kigali message around 2004 in addition to the appeal of justice against the perpetrators of the remembered massacre.

The main event of the week would take place at the Amahoro National Stadium. Therefore, I took a taxi outside the hotel in the morning and rode along the way to the ceremony in memory of the decade of the Rwandan Genocide. At first, the avenue took us to the Union Trade Center, and next, we turned right through a long linked road without intersections or traffic jams.

The driver kept the vehicle at a low speed so that we could have a smooth ride while I was looking out the window, wondering what those scenes seemed to be in a distant past. I had made a point of leaving early so as not to lose time on the road to the Amahoro Stadium. We rode by the Parliament of Rwanda on the same route until we arrived at the renowned restaurant Chez Lando that made me think about the old days. Then, we turned left and approached the final phase of the trip.

Along the way, I read the event schedule, and I resolved I would leave the Amahoro after the President of Rwanda Paul Kagame's pronouncement. According to the brochure in my hands that the staff of the Mille Collines Hotel gave me, it would occur at half past twelve. We were to hear a few words from heads of state and other authorities as well as testimonies of living victims. Before the president's speech, an act of 10 minutes of silence in respect to the dead would happen, and afterward, we would watch performances of music, poetry and hear other reports of casualties. This would be the proper moment for me to leave the site. Elsewhere in the country, similar ceremonies occurred for the same purpose.

Outside the stadium, I followed the commoners who were going to the bleachers, and after that, I walked in and found accommodation among the 65 thousand spectators. A band performed for the crowd and, at the scheduled occasion, President Kagame spoke movingly to his compatriots, and in his words, he blamed France, pointing to the French troops as contributors to the occurrence of the slaughter and even as participants in the fighting.

"They knowingly trained and paid government soldiers and militia who were going to commit genocide, and they knew they would commit genocide..."

The tough words were sufficient for the Minister of Foreign Affairs of President François Mitterrand, Renaud Muselier, to shorten his visit to the country. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, urged us to share in a moment of silence at noon, to mark the international day of reflection on the Rwandan Genocide. He called for the nations of the world to adopt preventive and concrete measures so that such catastrophes did not happen for a second time. The criticism addressed to some great nations that did not participate in the events sponsored by the Rwandese Government was a recurring theme. Others, such as Belgium and the United States, apologized for their passivity in the face of what had occurred in 1994.

While I was sitting in the stands of the Amahoro, enjoying an inner peace and a desired anonymity, a soldier in charge of security, who had been casting glances at me since I got there, gave me from afar a daring and intriguing gaze. Thus, I got a good look at my body up and down.

What is he looking at?

Putting on my sunglasses and feigning indifference, I expected him to stop his curiosity, especially because a flirting was inopportune, since the sad ceremony was not conducive to giving somebody the eye. Even so, soon after, he came to me, and I got ready to say no, politely, if he was to ask me out with an inappropriate dalliance. He questioned me, instead:

"Excuse me, madam. You are Dr. Isabelle, aren't you?"

"Yes."

I confirmed my name because I figured he could be a bearer of information from the Thousand Hills Hotel. The manager was supposed to schedule my departure by plane that afternoon. He would send someone to look for me at the stadium if he found a cancellation. Unfortunately, the man declared:

"I met you in 1994."

I regretted having told him the truth.

"This is just a misunderstanding, and perhaps, you are confusing me with other Isabelle."

"I don't think so, miss. You look like her, and besides, seeing a white doctor named Isabelle in Rwanda is not that easy. I served in the Rwandan Patriotic Front Intelligence that year."

"No, I've never been here before. I am sorry, but I have to go now. Goodbye." I wanted so bad to go away.

* * * * *

The trooper, once leaving the site, then, with other colleagues, could not keep his eyes off the doctor. His hands kept on beckoning to her, yet she walked faster and purposely ducked into an agglomeration of people to obstruct his approach. He hastened, fearing to lose her sight, cutting his eyes between Isabelle and his other daily affairs. Lamentably, the mass of spectators swallowed up the foreign woman. She who had made his way through the crowd now suspected that the man had the mission of not letting her escape. Lucky for him, she stood out among the Rwandese around the football stadium. He looked round for her and probed an attendee.

"Did you see a white, young woman come by here a minute ago?"

"I have just talked to her, yet she is headed for the taxi stand."

The young officer returned to his workstation and commented to his fellows that the doctor had left the Amahoro. As the foreigner had ignored him, he requested permission to abandon the silly, ill-timed task.

To hell with her reasons. She may move to whatever she wants!

His immediate superior radioed the command center and received an unpleasant reply.

"Lieutenant, for God's sake! Find the Yankee straightaway. You should not have let that woman get out of the containment area. She must be dangerous or is involved in something sinister because the Army High Command wants her immediately."

"The woman proceeded to the airport to catch her flight home, sir."

"Well, go there and throw a lasso around the darn plane and bring it down, then. If we do not capture her, we will serve in Byumba from tomorrow."

"Are you serious, sir?"

"Do you think I am joking? The Defense Minister himself has just ordered me to do this. So, hurry up!"

"Can I shoot if she struggles?"

"I am afraid you can't because they want her alive. I will give you instructions on the radio during the chase, but don't let her get out of your sight again."

When he reached the exit gate, Isabelle had just come out of the Amahoro, taking a cab. He was aware that he could not fail in capturing the American woman, as his military future depended on the success of that mission. He questioned some taxi drivers.

"Did you see a beautiful, foreign woman going through here?"

They answered.

"Yes, she came here, appearing to be in a hurry now that it was almost time for her airplane to take off. She has just left."

"Where did she go?"

"She rushed to the Thousand Hills and from there to the Kanombe, for sure."

The lieutenant sped to the Kigali airport, turned on the car radio to say:

This is Lieutenant Ngoma in pursuit of a foreign, white woman fleeing to Kanombe Airport. If anyone sees her in another path, try to hold her, but do not use unnecessary violence. Act with determination and caution because we do not know if she is dangerous. Over!

I arrived at the airport, checked in and sat on a bench in the departure area, waiting for my flight, which fortunately was bound for New York. I did not intend to spend another minute in Rwanda because I had returned to fit myself in the past, and I was satisfied. The plane was on schedule, and right on time, the airport officials called the passengers to board. I got into the airplane, feeling already problem-free and far away from Kigali when it started taxiing down the way.

Suddenly, an armed force stepped into the Kanombe, scaring everybody. I wonder if it were a revolution or a coup. They came to the runway, blocking the aircraft with their vehicles, preventing it from taking off. Three militaries boarded, looking at all sides, and when they saw me, approached. A young officer positioned in front of me and inquired.

"Are you the American Dr. Isabelle, madam?"

"Yes, I am. Why?"

"I need you to come with me."

"What makes you think I'll do this?"

"My higher-ups want to see you."

By the insignia on his uniform, I saw he was a lieutenant, a young junior officer with a catchy appearance that evoked fond memories of someone else I had met a decade before in the same locale. He seemed surprised when I replied him using his patent in the Rwandan Army.

"Lieutenant, I am sorry, I need to depart. Please, tell your commander I'll visit him some other time."

"A special man is waiting for you, Doc, and he brought something to persuade you to take the meeting, uncritically."

Lieutenant Ngoma called a trooper and ordered him to pick up a package in a vehicle in front of the plane. The man came back with a beautiful flower arrangement, and it would not mean much to me if it were not composed of anthuriums, heliconias, strelitzias, gingers and African violets. I picked up the flowers and their scent took me back ten years earlier as tears trickled down out of my eyes, since a wistful longing for the Twa Tharcisse Mugabe clearly appeared in my mind. I was amazed to feel that, just in the moment of my departure from Kigali, the ghosts finally were visible in the form of a sorrow streaming down my face.

"Where are these flowers from?" The officer tapped my shoulder and explained:

"Along the way, I heard on the radio you might ask me this, Dr. Isabelle. They told me to tell you that the answer to this question is part of the matter, once you follow me."

The other passengers seemed surprised on looking at my tearful eyes because I received flowers, yet troopers were forcing me to disembark against my will. They thought:

Was the bouquet a nod of friendship or a debauchery of doubtful taste and inappropriate for the moment?

The crew tried to understand why the Rwandese Army stopped the plane. Besides being afraid, they were sorry for me because it was clear that those sinister, uniformed and armed men were catching me.

I asked the lieutenant.

"Who is insisting on talking to me, officer?"

"The president of this country himself, Paul Kagame, Dr. Isabelle."

I stood up and followed the Rwandese soldiers along the narrow aisle as a sergeant confiscated and carried my luggage. The passengers were silent, feeling the tension in the air following us for their relief. The soldiers, all them young men, for their part, did not know why they held me, and they expressed this in prying eyes. Thus, I stepped off the airplane to face my destiny, and when I was going down the airport, most people aboard the plane went to the windows to witness me walking across the Kanombe escorted by militaries. They looked down on me, with concern about my situation, seeming to believe I had gotten into a big trouble, or I was so dangerous to the point that the Army had almost run over a plane that size on takeoff just to hold me in Rwanda any longer.

II - AROUND TEN YEARS BEFORE – KIGALI

Isabelle lived in New York with her mother and her father served in the Senate, spending most of his time in Washington, being home only on weekends. Until the mid-eighties of the twentieth century, her routine was active, as she trained target-shooting sports at first light, studied at the medical school in the afternoon, and in the evening, practiced either judo or wrestling. Although it was difficult to conciliate them all, she always tried to do her best. She joined the American Fighting Team in the Olympics and won a silver medal, and she felt sorry for failing to become the champion.

She competed in the Judo, average weight class, during the XXIV Seoul Olympic Games in South Korea, in 1988. She made a stunning qualifying round. In the semifinal against a German girl, however, she got seriously hurt when she dropped the opponent, going for an *ippon*, yet only reaching a *waza-ari*.

Judges grant this score when the fighter tries an *ippon*, but he does not apply it perfectly, causing the rival to fall without his back aligned parallel to the ground. She won the fight, even so, injured her arm, as the German fell on it with all the weight. The accident left everybody apprehensive, and Isabelle was at an impasse because she should not play for the gold medal in that way. Many tried to persuade her not to return to the *dojo*. She ignored them, though. When the crowd saw her enter the room holding one arm to prevent it from coming out of her body, they became silent. She looked at her adversary and saw the happiness stamped on the face of malice. The Russian sniggered when she greeted the American girl with the tiniest hint of a smile because the gold was hers. Then, on starting the contest, the adversary took the American woman by the judo suit and threw her on the mat, scoring an *ippon*, the perfect blow. Once Isabelle landed on the floor, the pain shot through her body like a wave. Everyone greeted her, and TV networks from around the world wanted to interview the American contender. Although the news reported that Isabelle was an example of the Olympic spirit, she did not care about whether she had that spirit in her heart or not, since she was sorry for having managed merely to gain a silver medal. She behaved in Seoul this way, she acts along these lines today, and so, she will be the same person she has always been.

* * * * *

When I finished my degree in medicine at the age of 25, I had the opportunity to do some voluntary work for the Red Cross as a doctor, and I hoped it was in India, yet unfortunately, they sent me to Rwanda. A college professor chose me, and I accepted the task; nonetheless, I ask him just out of curiosity:

"Why did you choose me to take this forward, Professor?"

"It's just because you are a pampered, rich girl, Isabelle."

The middle-aged man was a good American citizen and a typical Democratic Party voter, and Father was a republican that opposed to the US President Bill Clinton, who was on the side of my master. After the Red Cross staff contacted him, he evaluated the curriculum of all medical practitioners graduating that year. He pondered I was fortunate to be born into a family with good financial resources, and thanks to this, I had a moral duty to help the needy across the world, without taking into account they also existed in New York.

"It does not give you a reason to punish me."

"Hahaha. Joining the Red Cross is not a punishment, Isabelle. I guess that a year and a half getting in touch with the poverty in the Third World will turn you into a mature woman."

What a bunch of blessed and prophetic words!

On arriving for the first time in Rwanda, in 1993, and leaving the Kigali airport, I proceeded to the local Red Cross office where I met Dr. Mike, an elegant English doctor about 50 years old, who oversaw the operation of health concern in Central Africa. He was an intelligent man with a little spiritual belief into a handsome profile in spite of his age. Because of the ongoing racial conflict in Rwanda, he aimed to bring together a team of professionals who were experienced in military affairs. He was adjusting his work-group by people rotation, and acting out like this, he was not satisfied with my appointment to the post of a medical officer just there, considering that I was a beginner. As like as not, I would work at the Kigali Hospital Center, a medical compound that was under the guidance of the Belgian Government as part of a project of humanitarian assistance to Rwanda.

The first characteristic that grabbed my attention in Kigali was its rugged relief, since the capital as well as the whole Rwanda is mountainous. The locals call that nation the land of a thousand hills because of this. Thousand Hills, by the way, is the name of the hotel where I was at first. Doctor Mike wanted me to reside in a religious center under the care of an Italian bishop, yet I informed him that I intended to live alone somewhere downtown, since my trip primarily aimed at my insertion in a new culture. As I was young and adventurous, the possibility to interact with different people in Africa was close to my heart. Furthermore, I saw no point in having come to such a long way just to live with Europeans. In contrast, such feeling surprised Dr. Mike.

"I am sorry, but this interest is weird, Dr. Isabelle. Everyone justifies his participation in aid programs to the Third World with the wish to help people in need."

"I would feel good about helping others, sir, but I also intend to acquire knowledge for my professional life and become an experienced woman by keeping in touch with people from outside my element."

"You are from a wealthy family, aren't you?"

"Yes, I never had to push hard to get material goods."

"May I see your African adventure as a whim of a posh girl?"

"I would not put it that way, but if you see the rich from this angle I would say so."

"All right, Dr. Isabelle. Judging people before I get to know them is none of my business. Coming here in good faith is all you need in a poverty-stricken country that has to prioritize the preventive medicine and care for the sane people not to get ill."

"They alerted me to it. As my agreement with the Red Cross will last just one year, I can handle this workload."

"Did you settle an income value?"

"I have not done it yet. As I said, I don't care about money."

"The Red Cross has four centers of work, Dr. Isabelle: Kigali, Kibungo, Butare, and Kibuye. We had five, but our agency in Byumba recently closed its doors now that the government is unable to secure our volunteers down there."

"Why not?"

"The Tutsi rebels raided the North, and those lands have turned into a living hell. We cannot work in that region except in joint operations with the Army."

"What do they want, Dr. Mike?"

"I cannot believe you have not read about this country."

"I didn't have time because until last week I was not sure to which place the Red Cross would send me. I guessed they would appoint me to work in an Eastern country, and I expected it to be India."

"Why didn't you go there?"

"The Red Cross focused on some domestic issues, and at the last minute, a Romanian girl was in my place. A colleague related to me that someone from that country requested her presence."

"Did you tolerate this injustice?"

"What could I do? As the Indians imposed another professional, I felt rejected and gave up helping them."

"Now, this adds up! That is why the Red Cross opened up an additional post in Rwanda. I wonder if you have read the history of India and not ours."

"Yes."

Dr. Mike took a huge map, spread it on the table and talked it over to point at the geographical features of the country, telling me a bit about the Rwandan History. He drove home the political divisions in provinces, districts, municipalities, cities, villages, and so on. Additionally, he enlightened me on the economy towards farming and livestock, and on the country's ethnic composition.

"Why do so few T'was inhabit this country?" I questioned him.

"They comprise only one percent of the population, but one sees that they are many when considers the shocking conditions in which they live. Tutsis and Hutus are killing them aimlessly. Consequently, the Pygmies are on the brink of extinction and doomed to die one by one."

"What a horror!"

The doctor cleared up me that the two ethnic groups were in a historic struggle for power. Even though the Tutsis had been in charge for years, the Hutus dominated the country now, persecuting and massacring the Tutsis in some recent occasions. As a result, thousands of refugees fled the

country, mainly to the neighboring Uganda, where they established a guerrilla movement called Rwandan Patriotic Front. The goal of the Tutsi movement was to reach the capital and take the central government. According to the Englishman, the situation was worsening every passing day, as the Hutus were using brute force to intimidate the Tutsi civilian in Rwanda in revenge for the attacks on the northern perimeter where some villages were already in the RPF's possession.

The Rwandese named the outcast rebel group, its members and supporters Inkotanyis, a word meaning invincible in Kinyarwanda, their primal language. The Hutus dubbed the Tutsis inyenzi (cockroaches) with a pejorative and an offensive connotation. They said that the origin of this term with this significance dates back to the time when the exiled Tutsis were walking around the border of the country in the dark nights, camouflaging themselves throughout the days, what is a custom that cockroaches, nocturnal insects, adopt. The pressure on the northern front was rising and disturbing the Hutus, who saw the possibility of being deported growing quickly.

"You still have time to give up, Dr. Isabelle. I am flexible with workers who do not feel safe in this place."

"The professional who applies to the Red Cross knows he may work in troubled environments."

"This is true, but the situation in this region is unusual, seeing as we do not have narrowly restricted trouble spots. This conflict has spread all the way through this society, and I fear that it will come to our neighborhood soon. Countless unprepared civilians are in action in this civil war."

"You are nothing encouraging, Dr. Mike."

"I am being honest with you, since Kigali is on a war footing. This misgoverned country is not worth the trouble, and it is not a place for a young, pretty and well-educated lady like you. Perhaps, you can find something better in an Eastern European nation or even in Asia."

"What are you talking about? Do you want me to return now to the airport? Can a bomb fall on our heads?"

"Oh! I see you are witty, and this helps to relieve tension. You don't have to go today because the next flight is departing in two days."

"No problem, sir. I will be glad if you book me a comfortable airplane seat. I am an American woman, and not a called Joan of Arc, who got involved in fighting in the medieval period."

"It was a wise decision, Dr. Isabelle. Now, appreciate this period. I will take you to the Mille Collines Hotel, and after that, we will go to the Kigali Hospital Center. At least these two days, I mean to show you how medicine works in the Third World."

When we were about to leave the place, after he rolled up the map, a young, worried woman showed up in a hurry. Noticing people from the CHK looking for him, Dr. Mike inquired the girl.

"Good morning, Rose, is something wrong?"

Rose Kabaguyoi was a competent 22-year-old nurse who worked at the hospital in Kigali. She was a tall and elegant young Tutsi of slender shape, having a thin face like most people of her ethnicity. She lived at the Good Hope Farm (GH farm or GHF), which was owned by the well-off farmer Emmanuel Habimana, a 68-years-old Tutsi. The farm was located in the Southern Province in the nearby district of Gitarama that is 70 kilometers away from the capital. Rose constantly had to make a tiring trip back and forth whenever she was on call at the KH Center.

"I am afraid so, Dr. Mike, considering that we have a medical emergency at the hospital for you."

"Let's go then. Come on, Dr. Isabelle. It is a good chance for you to know the CHK. Welcome to our private hell! First, this beautiful girl is Rose Kabaguyoi, one of our nurses. Rose, this is Dr. Isabelle, who would be with us, but she is leaving. How did you get here, Rose? Are you riding?"

"I am walking. I came in an ambulance, but it stayed behind because the clerks were transporting a patient."

"Let us use the vehicle of the Red Cross, then."

Dr. Mike drove the car fast through the narrow streets of the city. It was a brand new Land Rover pickup. Rose addressed me.

"Why don't you stay with us, Dr. Isabelle?"

"I did not get one iota of encouragement from Dr. Mike. He informed me that the current social and political situation in this country is not good. What can we do, right?"

"Isn't the Red Cross ready for these circumstances?"

"Yes, it was conceived to operate in conflict regions too."

"So, you should not go away. You seem to be a nice person."

"Thank you, Rose, but don't let it bother you because another doctor will be hired to replace me. Dr. Mike thinks I am not up to scratch, and he wants somebody with experience in crisis and military conflicts."

"When are you leaving?"

"I'm going home the day after tomorrow."

"So, I am not leaving your side, and I will try to change your mind."

On that occasion, we were in mid-1993, and the situation in Rwanda was not good. Nevertheless, it did not look like the lawlessness that would come up in the following year. Hostilities occurred, yet a hopeful message was in the air and the catchword was "peace", as the Hutus and the

Tutsis were negotiating the signing of a power-sharing agreement, involving a democratic regime installation that embraced broad and free elections for all political offices. Some critics, in turn, affirmed that they were vaguely doing it.

"Didn't he tell you that we have begun a process of pacification?" Rose probed me.

I addressed Dr. Mike, who seemed to be indifferent to our conversation.

"The conflicts are ending, Dr. Mike, and the parties will sign a non-aggression treaty."

"Don't trust this, Dr. Isabelle. At the end of the negotiations, the two ethnic groups continuously fail to come to an agreement, and they are trying to sit well with the international public opinion."

"Why do the government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front want to impress other nations?"

"They need money, and without a prospect of peace, foreign donors will not send resources for development projects and social services. They know that parts of each donation go towards military spending."

"Which countries send resources for this revolution?"

"Well, in matters of money and help to the Hutus, France is unbeatable."

"What about the Tutsis?"

"The Ugandan National Resistance Army is harboring them, giving guns and training to the Inkotanyis. The RPF was born there among the refugees and some of its officers fought for the NRA."

We arrived at the hospital and walked swiftly to see the urgency. The occurrence was an awful, villainous rape of a Twa committed by a Hutu or Tutsi, and therefore, I was feeling down because violence against women was my first medical case in Rwanda. When Dr. Mike noted my embarrassment, he tried to comfort me, mitigating the scene.

"Do not be impressed, Dr. Isabelle because Kigali is not New York. In this part of the world, rapes are almost as common as influenza epidemics." He exaggerated to highlight the mistreatment of women in Rwanda of those days.

As the small Pygmy was about to die, a pity took over me, partly because she was a tiny, young and weak person who was unable to defend herself. Deep inside myself, I could not believe that my reception in Rwanda was that way. I searched information about her.

"How old is this sweet little thing?"

Rose guessed:

"She must be about twelve years old, Dr. Isabelle."

"Have they already arrested the perpetrator?"

"The gendarmerie will not hold him." Meaning military forces with police duties among civilians in Rwanda.

"Why not? How can you say that?"

"I'm not surprised, but I do not know if you noticed that she is a Twa."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"It was to be expected, as the gendarmes do not jail folks who mistreat Pygmies."

"The Twas are a minority and the regular justice doesn't cover them, Dr. Isabelle. Nobody notices or minds." The doctor added.

"How come, Doctor?"

"People are rarely aware of them because the Pygmies are from the lowest strata of society, with no formal registration as citizens. Therefore, they have difficulty in claiming their rights."

"Are you telling me that this girl has no birth certificate or identification card?"

"Probably not. It is like she doesn't exist."

"Why doesn't anybody protest against this, Dr. Mike?"

"I know some non-governmental organizations standing up for the rights of the Twas of Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo, but this topic is not a concern of the Red Cross. You can volunteer for charities, going to a church to check what you can do to help these destitute people. Some missionaries carry this banner, but even so, this work is thankless."

"Why did the thug attack this girl? She has nothing to draw attention to herself."

The doctor replied:

"This case is legally a sexual offense, but the pleasure was not the cause of this crime, Dr. Isabelle. The rapist did not feel sexually attracted to her."

"How do you know it?"

"People have an ancient belief in this place that a man can cure pains in his back if he has sex with a Twa. Such superstition is absurd, but not for a legion of locals."

"I wonder if he has a discomfort in his spine."

Dr. Mike made a brief silence, and Rose heavily paraphrased the physician's information.

"I wish he had a bad back, Dr. Isabelle, because it is likely the attacker is an HIV carrier, and he had sex with this Twa, hoping to overcome his disease. These rapes against the Pygmy girls are the fruits of people's ignorance and have become common lately. Sadly, this little Twa is one more victim of such stupidity."

Taking part in the medical case of the penurious, little girl, seeing her go through all that tore my heart to pieces. As a human being, I felt like I was partly to blame for the case, and as a physician, I found absurd that such superstitions still existed late in the year of 1993. I did not think her situation could get better soon, and it was even doubtful if she could get over her injuries and the postoperative period. Nonetheless, I have nothing more to do in that ward, and therefore, Rose and I stepped out to the gate of the hospital for a breath of fresh air. It was late, and the weather had cooled when a military vehicle of the FAR (Forces Armées Rwandaises) stopped in front of us, and a tall and elegant officer approached. He greeted us and headed to Rose.

"Hi, Rose! Is Dr. Mike in the hospital? General Gedeon Bagirubwira wants to see him."

"Hey, you, Lieutenant Fred Kaka! Come in, please. I will put you through." She pointed at me and said to the Hutu:

"This is Dr. Isabelle, our newest member of the medical staff. She is American and works for the Red Cross."

"Nice to meet you, miss. The Army owes much to the Red Cross, and if you need something, you can count on us. Dr. Mike is a friendly sort of man and a great co-worker."

Lieutenant Fred Kaka was a 29-years-old personable, intelligent and young military Hutu.

"The pleasure is mine, sir."

* * * * *

Rose went to find Dr. Mike, who would be somewhere in the hospital flirting with the Tutsi nurses, whispering sweet nothings in their ears. When he arrived and saw the militaries, he knew that he had to appear in front of them at the Kigali headquarters. He would see the fat, hard-drinking General Gedeon Bagirubwira, a powerful and narcissistic 59-years-old Hutu officer who was one of the hardest antagonists of the Tutsi ethnicity. The English doctor was a close friend of the Hutu general.

As a means of preventing the newcomer from feeling alone, groping for things to do in the city streets or walking around for no reason, the Londoner asked Rose to go with the American doctor for a little sightseeing tour. Yet he made a thousand recommendations on how she ought to assume the care of Isabelle in the dangerous Kigali.

"Rest assured, Dr. Mike, because I will do it in the best possible way. That is how you want it. Is not that so?"

"Please, Rose, you may walk her around the block, but try not to influence her. This decision rests with her."

"Oh, all right, Doctor. Do not trouble yourself because I will take good care of Dr. Isabelle."

The Tutsi noted that the foreigner was hesitant to go away. Furthermore, something was showing Isabelle that Rwanda needed strong women like her, mainly because it was short of doctors. However, Dr. Mike had been clear when he insisted he looked for someone with experience on missions of that nature.

Dr. Isabelle, I am sorry, but I cannot employ you even in support jobs, considering that one day this war will also affect these works!

"Wow! Have you ever seen anything like this, Doctor?"

"Yes, I know what you mean. It is about the beauty of Lieutenant Fred Kaka, isn't it?"

"Yeah! He is enticing. That man has always been in the latest style, and it is a pity he is getting married next year."

"Stop worrying, Rose. I have seen wedding rings fall at church doors."

"I wish, but he is not for the likes of me. Although Kigali women love Lieutenant Fred Kaka, he has eyes only for one of us, and his parents baby and spoil him so much."

"It is not a defect, but a virtue. Being a member of a good family is a grace."

"I understand, Dr. Isabelle, but you should know I have several friends who would like him to be more daring in dealing with women such as enjoying life a little bit..."

"Hahaha. Hallelujah! I see that the Rwandan girls are similar to the Americans."

On seeing the newcomer smiling, Rose felt pleased, since she noted that the suffering of the little Twa had been harmful to Isabelle. She looked across the street and saw that Tharcisse Mugabe was sitting on a stool and leaning against the trunk, in the shade of a majestic podocarp. The tree is native to Africa, and this encouraged the Rwandese Administration to plant it in the capital as part of a landscaping project. Apart from being beautiful, it adapted well to the medium altitudes and climatic conditions of the Kigali Province.

Tharcisse Mugabe was an intelligent and likable 27-years-old Twa. A farmer who bred ankole cattle in Byumba supported his parents to raise him. His father was a well-liked employee on the property, and, in thanks to a valuable working performance, and in return for an undying loyalty, the employer bore the cost of the boy's studies. Even having formal knowledge, he could not obtain a job opportunity, and as he did not intend to toil with the

craft of clay as most Pygmies did, he opened himself up to a new and unusual line of business: he made his living from a self-employment, growing and selling flowers to the funeral events in Kigali. The Tutsi said:

"I would like you to meet another Twa, Dr. Isabelle."

"I am not sure if I should. One Pygmy was sufficient for today."

"This one is different from others."

"Why is he so special?"

"He is good-natured, cute, and helpful."

"All right, baby, let us see your friend. After all, I am at your disposal. You are my chief today, Madam Dr. Mike."

"God forbids! I don't want to be that known Don Juan."

"I found him handsome, Rose."

"You and half the Tutsis in this city."

"Does he like only Tutsi girls?"

"It's not just about him, but men, on the whole, prefer the Tutsi girls. You see, the Hutu women do not have our charm. Hahaha."

"Wow! Do you mean charm or something else, Rose Kabaguyoi?"

Rose laughed and pointed it out.

"Womanly attributes, everything, Dr. Isabelle. Hahaha."

"Who knows if someday he finds me attractive like you are? An American Tutsi."

Rose yelled at Tharcisse Mugabe.

"Tharcisse Mugabe! Tharcisse Mugabe, come here, please!"

The Twa came in a blink of an eye.

"Here I am! What is the problem, Mrs. Kabaguyoi?"

"Full Stop! Do not call me Mrs. because I am not that old."

"As you wish, Ms. Rose Kabaguyoi, I won't call you madam anymore."

Stopping Tharcisse Mugabe from treating Rose formally was difficult. Such servility represented the inferiority that he believed to possess. Additionally, he had learned it in the schools, and it was a daily occurrence. Even though he became jovial when she told him off, he always returned to formality soon after.

"I want you to meet Dr. Isabelle. She works with us at the Hospital Center, and when she needs something, I want you to help her. Is it okay?"

"It is all right, Miss Kabaguyoi. Big up, Dr. Isabelle! My name is Tharcisse Mugabe."

"How is it going, Tharcisse Mugabe?"

"I'm great, miss."

"I see beautiful flowers."

"I sell them, Doc. Would you like to buy one?"

"Why should I do it? I prefer to receive flowers."

"A friend could bring you flowers, but not well enough to adorn your house."

"Well, stop being cheap and gift me one of those wedding blooms for me to put in my pigtail."

The Twa was avoiding waste.

"I would love to do it, but this is how I earn my daily bread, Dr. Isabelle."

"Will you sell them all?"

"The best part of them, yes, but the left over I leave with a friend who trades it at the cemetery gate on the following day. The dead are not as choosy about the commonwealth of nature as the living are."

"All right, Tharcisse. I see why Rose said you are a smart Twa. As scores of people die every month in these parts of the world, I bet you are doing well."

* * * * *

Although Rose had to show me a bit of the town, she focused on her needs, taking me to the congested, local market. The GH Farm was in the off-season, and such being the case, she decided to get some potatoes on the way there.

Prices were on the rise!

She invited Tharcisse Mugabe.

"Come on, Tharcisse. Let's take a walk."

The Kigali market is a bustling, noisy, crowded and multicolored outdoor fair of affordable prices. At the peak of the rush hour, when we were walking through its narrow alleys of tents positioned in parallel to each other, people paid attention to me knowing I was a newcomer. The vendors offered a full range of products, screaming at the top of their voices like crazy. The fair exudes traces of regionalism without equal thanks to the peculiar supply of native stuff. Its specialty is the trade in fruits, vegetables and cereals, although we eventually see from legal to illegal trinkets for sale. They exposed several items at ground level on extended towels, and thus, I noticed that hygiene was not substantial. At any rate, however, I was there to know the place and not to carry out a sanitary inspection. Rose bargained with the sellers to get the prices down, arguing loudly in a strange Kinyarwanda, and because of this, I did not

understand a lick of their speaking. Anyway, she appeared to be a tough buyer, since I had never seen anyone take so long to buy five kilos of potatoes. When she finally got the product at the lowest cost possible, and we were again on the boundary of the fair, a tumult with its stress and panic came toward us from inside the market. Two Hutus shouted in pursuit of a Pygmy, who jumped into the arms of Tharcisse, coming to us, trying to escape. The chasers approached, drew him aside and started beating the luckless chap with intensity while people around did not matter at all, and even Rose stood impassive, checking if every potato were in a purse that the Twa tipped over. The little man took a rude thrashing and he would not survive for long that way. Immediately, the scene reminded me of the unfortunate girl who was suffering in a hospital bed as a victim of a wicked coward from the kind of those troglodytes in front of me. Taken by these emotions, my heart burned and I took the potatoes from Rose's bag to hurl them against the nearest evildoer, who was punishing the Twa. As a bad result, one of the Hutus came, raised his open hand and smote me on the forehead, and I ended up on the floor about three meters away, falling on an old, wooden tent that toppled over producing a loud crash of breaking clay pots. The Hutu thought he had knocked me out and made a slip, just when I furiously jumped on his back, hitting him from behind with a high kick to his head, making him collapse right away. Rose was astonished without knowing what to do, seeing her job and project of life circling the drain while something tragic approached me in that mess. Although she cried out my name, I got right into the thick of a widespread brawl. Intruders joined the dispute supporting one side over the other or both at the same time, and all of a sudden, the riot turned into a settling of accounts between Hutus and Tutsis, getting more violent as pieces of stalls were flying everywhere. People were using sticks, stones and all sorts of blunt objects as weapons, and it was already possible to see some drops of blood splattered on the floor. Tharcisse Mugabe stood in front of me holding a terrifying wooden bat with a sharp nail at the tip, threatening whoever tried to attack me. The other Twa fought madly and hurt other men with up to double his size. Rose, on the other hand, screamed, begging me to get out of the mess, but she could not appease me. I would not easily leave that fight, since my self-control was gone. I have always been an impulsive girl, and my parents since my teenage years had given up on controlling my restless mood. Moreover, I had been an athlete when I was younger, training and competing in athletic events. I practiced martial arts for medical advice, discharging my adrenaline continuously high, and I liked adventure sports, such as mountaineering and parachuting. In short, I was a tough girl who was accustomed to withstanding hits in wrestling tournaments for the US Olympic Team, and thus, I did not get out of the middle of the action. Even if I did not defeat a young man, at least, I could hurt him for real. Then, I kicked people all the way, taking and landing punches, elbows, and knee jabs. They could not injure another Pygmy and came out just fine because

although I did not see the man who did the dirty work of raping the indigent Twa, at least, those ones I would get. Easily, I saw the image of the girl's attacker in each malevolent creature who tried to hurt the Pygmy in front of me. Only later, when the dust settled, and the blood cooled, I reasoned that I ran a serious risk.

The Hutu gendarmes showed up and vigorously held back the brutes and things quieted down. Various merchants had losses, since smart looters took the chance to plunder the fair, dragging the products for sale on open ground as they could. Sensible people called the gendarmerie to appease us, and when the police officers came to break up the fight, they did not understand why an American doctor was involved in the incident. Since the guards feared to hold me under arrest without authorization, they radioed the base of operations, and as instructed, surrendered all those who participated in the event. The troopers put us on knees, with our hands on the head, detaining nine people at gunpoint. On her side, Rose stayed out of the tumult without the courage to strike a single blow. Yet she did not leave me alone. Curious Rwandans were watching the scene, and when reporters of the *Television Libre des Mille Collines* or Radio Mille Collines arrived, the site became more agitated. Despite this jaunty name, it was not a television network, but a radio station. They started broadcasting the incident live on a daily variety show, what prompted more people to come over. The Kigalians were puzzled for seeing me misaligned, kneeling and arrested by the militaries. The way things were going, if I had tried to get an enthusiastic entry in Rwanda, I would not get such a perfect one, intentionally. The witnesses commented on the case for the spoken and written press wildly distorting the facts, boosting my accomplishment in the brawl against the Hutus.

They put the word out, saying that I was a keen master of Kung Fu, who with no more than one kick, toppled two fighters at once in a display of skills.

Ten minutes later, Dr. Mike and Lieutenant Fred Kaka, who had been earlier in the company of General Gedeon Bagirubwira, arrived, pushing through the masses, elbowing people aside. The Hutu leader ordered his lieutenant to determine the facts, smoothing things over in the most discreet way because an American, medical girl had committed a crime in a busy marketplace where street brawlers got out of hand. The primary recommendation was to lower the consequences of the police occurrence. He instructed his subordinates to release everyone and the subject died at the scene if no death had occurred. The officers had to confiscate the materials and look over the photographic content that the press intended to divulge about the incident. The general did not want to see the image of an American physician lying on the ground of a Kigali outdoor fair printed in any following day

newspapers. The case could turn into a diplomatic embarrassment, endangering the peace talks.

At that time, a help agreement between France and Rwanda was under way, and a diplomatic incident involving politicians who supported the Franco-Rwanda interface would be harmful to the local governance. In the forest parks, in hidden boot camps, instructors from the French Army trained and operated the Hutu militias, paramilitary groups that acted outside the law, causing turbulence and riots everywhere, such as the Impuzamugambi, a name that means *those who have the same goal*. They provoked fear and atrocious terror, and the worst of all, the most famous and bloodthirsty among them, was the vicious street gang labeled Interahamwe, *those who fight together*.

The Rwandese President Juvénal Habyarimana admired the American doctor's father, a politician allied with the guarantee of backing from the United States to a Hutu Rwanda.

Dr. Mike arrived, approached us and pulled me from among the arrested people. He led me into the Land Rover and instructed me to be quiet. He ordered Tharcisse not to leave me.

"What about the Twa, Dr. Mike?"

"Which Twa, Dr. Isabelle? Isn't he here on your side?"

"I do not mean Tharcisse Mugabe. I am talking about the other Twa!"

"Which other Twa? Did you get in touch with two Pygmies in only two hours?"

"They are not only two, but three. Did you forget the girl in the hospital?"

"Obviously not. By the way, I really don't know how to say it, but although the youngling held out to the last, lamentably, she didn't make it!"

"Do you see how those men are perverse? Go get the other Twa soon before they bury him alive!"

Dr. Mike did not understand how, in less than an afternoon in Kigali, I bumped into three Twas, who belong to an ethnic group with so few individuals. He looked around and did not see another Pygmy aside from the one near me, as the soldiers had locked Mukono inside a police car. He probed Tharcisse.

"Whom the hell is she talking about?"

"She is speaking of Mukono, Dr. Mike."

"Oh, no. I got out of bed on the wrong foot!"

The doctor turned to me and said:

"For crying out loud, Dr. Isabelle! Mukono is a worthless and cunning, little thief. Please, avoid him because he is problematic. He spent some time on the run, and I thought he was dead."

"Don't be dramatic! The men gathered to crush him to death in a public square. Do you know what he did wrong?"

Dr. Mike shrugged his shoulders.

"No, Doctor. I have no idea."

"He stole two oranges, presumptively, because he is hungry."

"Dr. Isabelle, you are not in New York. Here, taking a candy is like an automobile in the USA. These people have different moral principles from ours."

"The law of God is universal. Moreover, justice is a concept and not the written law of man, and lamentably they do not always go together. Take Mukono out of the hands of those insane beings. Don't you think the suffering of the little girl was enough? I will get him personally if you do not to take up the case because if I came this far, I will not take a step back."

Assuming he had no choice, the doctor bellowed.

"Okay, all right! Stop chattering and sit down, please. I am going to see what can be done in this regard."

* * * * *

Dr. Mike could not bear the talk and regretted having shown her the torment of the little Twa. Seeing that the experience had been harmful, he felt guilty for leading her to that point. So, even against his will, he came to Lieutenant Fred Kaka to request for the Pygmy, as Mukono would be the only jailed person of all the issue. Dr. Mike saw the Rwandans constantly taking the same measures in situations like that.

Why should he ask them to act differently this time?

"Lieutenant Fred Kaka, I ask you to let this Twa go."

"It is out of the question, Dr. Mike. We caught this bad egg red-handed, and he is the only one among all rioters who received a formal accusation of misconduct."

"Come on! This dude stole only two oranges, Lieutenant."

"What's that to me? I heard about this, but the law does not tell me to count oranges." Then, in few words, Fred Kaka lied, deciding to close the case. "He's just in custody, and this fact will be a mitigating circumstance for him."

"We know he will not be sued..."

"It is true. The order is to put an end to this little maggot on the way back. The gendarmes do not want to see him at the precinct because they have been getting too many complaints against this Twa for petty crimes and the police is on his heels. I am sorry to disappoint you, but his share of riots has pushed the limits of their patience."

"So, let me converse with General Bagirubwira. I will ask him to free this poor fellow. Please, radio him, Lieutenant."

"Frankly, Dr. Mike! We are treating the arrest of a simple Twa. If you press charges, the general will kill us both, and then, he will ask why he was bothered with such a small matter. We are able to settle this right here on our own. Why are you defending a Pygmy?"

"They are human beings too..."

"Hahaha. Do not give me that excuse. I bet my bottom dollar I will find a woman behind your sudden interest in these people. The American girl asked you this, didn't she? Do you know what the witnesses testified? She faced the Hutus to defend this little bugger. Hahaha. You can take your Twa, Dr. Mike, but keep this pitiful creature away from me, please."

"I'm obliged, Lieutenant Fred Kaka."

"One more thing, please. How long the nutty doctor will stay in Kigali?"

"Dr. Isabelle? She is to leave tomorrow."

"Great! It is for her sake and the joy of Rwanda. She is stark raving mad and dangerous, Dr. Mike. Were you who taught her Kung Fu fighting? Hahaha."

* * * * *

Dr. Mike got mad for the reason that people made a big deal out of nothing, causing excitement around. Before we left the scene, Rwandans surrounded the Land Rover where we were, Dr. Mike, Rose, the Twas and me. Spectators were jumping, cracking up, and joking with us on the verge of a mass hysteria. Therefore, he felt embarrassed, as the crowd went nuts and fooled him. During the return trip, he reprimanded me three times, making me sure that my contract with the Red Cross was over and my hopes of staying in Africa blew up in my face. Then, I wondered what I did wrong to make him angry that way. The Red Cross' leaders did not permit me to enter India, and they were kicking me out of Africa as well. Even so, I did not care, given that I had the USA that had to count for something. While driving, Dr. Mike did not stop reproaching us. On the other hand, the down-looking Twas were still like garden stones and silent in the back seat throughout the ride home, looking at us slyly out of the corner of their eyes. They seemed to fear the anger of the Englishman more than the Hutus' machetes of which they had gotten rid. As

the panic had gone, I felt the sharp pains from the bruises on my body. The doctor threatened to lay off Rose from the hospital, calling her incompetent for not having taken good care of me. He did not approve her decision to take me to the fair.

"Holy God, Rose Kabaguyo! You are nothing but an unmannerly yokel girl. How could you bring Dr. Isabelle to buy potatoes on her first day in Kigali?"

"I am sorry, Dr. Mike. I know I am wrong, but I did not mean to upset you." She was ashamed.

"Can't you see that this woman does not know how things are around here? She thinks she is in the Central Park where she is free to do as she pleases."

"I apologize for my mistake, sir."

He talked to Rose as if she had taken insufficient care of an incapable person.

"I asked you to keep an eye on her. I told you so."

"I was on to her, keeping a close eye, yet I just distracted me a little time to buy potatoes. And when I was taking the money, I got a fright, seeing her jumping on those Hutus only to exchange punches and kicks like an insane. Then, in the blink of an eye, all hell broke loose. God, she is brave! I get scared just looking at those men. Can you imagine the danger Dr. Isabelle ran into?"

Rose and the Twas stayed behind on the road. Dr. Mike, however, drove me back and made a point to take me straight into the Thousand Hills Hotel. He went away, and I got to bed. Around ten o'clock pm, a hotel employee knocked on the door, informing me that my parents were on the phone. I went downstairs to answer it.

"Sweetheart, are you all right there in Kigali?" My father fraternally probed me.

"Yes, Daddy, everything is in order! I was indirectly involved in a minor misunderstanding this afternoon, but it is all settled."

"The Red Cross people of New York dared to call me, informing that you would return soon. I argued that I had accepted without any complaint your discharge from India, and I did not agree with your departure from Rwanda, in any way, before talking to you personally. This is absurd! Is not that the way it is?"

Father is one of the most important politicians in the US Senate and he has much political power worldwide. He is cool; nonetheless, when he is not in the mood or gets upset with something, becomes dangerous. I do not know what he did to make them tolerate my permanence in Kigali. My mother, who is more sensible, pondered instead.

"Do you intend to live in that country, sweetie? I am missing you to death, and even your puppy has fallen into stress with longing."

"I don't know, Mom..."

* * * * *

Isabelle's father felt it was time for her to take some responsibility in her personal and social life. He was born into an impoverished family that migrated from France to New York, and he succeeded in politics for being a fair, austere and charismatic leader. Consequently, he was not happy with his daughter's development until then. In his judgment, living for a year in a distant nation, having contact with a new culture would be good for the girl as a human being and American citizen. He saw Rwanda as a good option after the Indian failure, as she would approach the poverty that exists in the world and realizes that life is not all about shopping on the Fifth Avenue. Moreover, the union between France and Rwanda was to his liking, and he knew that the small Republic was strategic for France in its Central African geopolitical affairs. After all, having a daughter working as a doctor in that suffering country was worth and politically advantageous for him. He had just mentioned Isabelle's adventure in the Senate and received high praise from party colleagues. He knew that a change of plan in that moment would not be beneficial, and therefore, he convinced her to establish herself in Kigali for a while to help him, giving elements to some speeches supporting a Franco-Rwandan Hutu regime.

"Dad, the head of the Red Cross people mentioned me that he does not want me on his work team."

Her father got irritated and urged her to repeat what she had put in.

"Ah! It is a certain Dr. Mike, isn't it?"

"Yes, Dad."

"I made a move on him, and he will no more bother you."

"What did you do to him?"

"No big deal, darling. I only convinced him to change his mind. He is odd and enigmatic, and I could not get wind of much about a Dr. Mike from our files. Be careful with this Londoner. If he is really English..."

"He doesn't seem like a cruel guy and is just concerned about my safety. We know that you are suspicious of the British."

"That is right, Isabelle" He agreed. "Perhaps, I am exaggerating a bit, but first of all, he is not supposed to support you either. Look for the French military because I am relying on Colonel Pierre Raynaud, the French corps commander, to help you and he is at your service."

"Thank you, Dad! Please, tell mom I send her my love."

He cut her off in mid-sentence.

"Please, wait! Do not hang up without saying good-bye to your mother; otherwise, she kills me. Just one more thing, dear. Do you want me to transfer Dr. Mike? I promote you to chief medical officer and send him to another spot."

"Good God! Do not do it, Daddy! You agreed I was coming to become independent. Why are you being overprotective again?"

"It is all right. I always forget that you are no longer the little kid in my lap. Nevertheless, be careful with this Englishman because I found him queer when I saw his profile with the intelligence staff. Are you sure he is nothing but a simple doctor?"

"Yep, I am. Please, stop seeing politics in everything. What are you looking for, Daddy?"

"Well, all right, anything you want, Isabelle. I will not interfere in your work affairs because I promised you that, and I will keep my word. I am passing the phone to your mother."

"I appreciate it, Dad. Love!"

* * * * *

When I arrived at the Red Cross' officer in the next morning, I noticed that Dr. Mike was resigned and thoughtful, and I imagined if he had just taken a drink of the horrible 'Twas' banana beer. He did not tell me anything about what happened the previous night in his talks with Rwandese authorities and heads of the Red Cross to make him alter his judgment about me. I saw fit not to bring this up. Dr. Mike guided me to fill out some intake forms, made an entry in an old book, and handed me two plus-size white gowns with my name printed on their upper, left pockets. I would start immediately my shifts at the CHK, and he bade me go to the hospital and present myself to the chief doctor on duty, Paul Nicayenzi. He was so upset with my presence that he did not care about going with me, and when I left, Tharcisse Mugabe was standing next to the front door. He had followed me there.

"Good morning, Dr. Isabelle."

"A very good morning to you, too. What are you doing here, Tharcisse Mugabe?"

"I was waiting for you."

"What for, 'Twa?"

"It is for nothing." He thought a bit and sadly murmured. "I came just to see you off..."

"I'm not leaving anymore."

The Twa lit up, making a vivid expression of joy, getting that special feeling. Then, he grinned at me, paying attention to my enormous getup.

"Golly! You look nice in your new clothes."

"It is a medical gown, you silly boy, and I am on my way to work."

"You are going to the Kigali Hospital Center, aren't you? Could I accompany you, Doc?"

"This is kind. I don't know which way to take."

* * * * *

Days later, Isabelle would know that President Juvenal Habyarimana had talked with Dr. Mike about her sojourn in Kigali. He announced that the residence of a daughter of a great American politician in Rwanda was unprecedented. Furthermore, her spontaneous decision to work for the Rwandese underclass was a motive of pride and an inestimable honor. He saw Isabelle's mission as a yes warranty to the French-Hutu collaboration given by the American leadership. He warned Dr. Mike that he dealt with the potential next President of the United States, in other words, with the future most powerful man in the world. According to him, saying no, via official means, to the liberal contribution of a kind, young, American doctor seemed to be a tremendous lack of education, was a crime against the country, and could bring serious political embarrassment to Rwanda. He stated, moreover, that he had meant to formalize the visit of Isabelle to Rwanda with pride, giving her diplomatic status. The US Ambassador, however, feared terrorist attacks against the girl if someone openly disclosed her political connections. The diplomat explained to the president that the Isabelle's stay in Kigali had no official connotation, taking into account that she was there as a healthcare professional and not for being the daughter of a US senator. Although Dr. Mike was prestigious in the Red Cross, he could not handle such pressure on him.

* * * * *

My first working month at the Red Cross was productive and gradually I was getting the hang of it. Through the work of caregiver in the Kigali Hospital Center, I faced all sorts of diseases to be treated, and I brought to myself a new appreciation of life from those experiences. The AIDS epidemic was the most common medical tackling for the nation, and it was becoming widely expanded by the local population as a devastating moral influenza, dragging to death countless unlucky, destitute people. Worse, the lack of information and the prejudices were contributing to the spread of the disease, turning this illness into something trivial among the ordinary masses. I started helping Dr. Mike to write some articles for scientific journals of North

America, Europe, and Asia. I worked hard when we monitored some fieldwork for large pharmaceutical, multinational companies, earning some money on it. We had a wide, free medical research field, since the disgrace of the Rwandans was a source of data for health across the world. Fortunately, with this initiative, I calmed the doctor down, and he gradually admired me and acknowledged my importance for the CHK and even for the forwarding of his research, medical work. He was a good entrepreneur and knew how to accumulate wealth, and I noticed that his business was not only providing aid. He could not deny that I was an ideal partner for him because, besides being helpful in carrying out my job as an insomniac workhorse, I only required just about petty cash in return. Why would I need money if my family did not know what to do with the amount we already had? In Rwanda, I donated much of my earnings to deserving causes in favor of the extreme poor, and therefore, I did not care about how much Dr. Mike got from his monitoring reports. I only wanted him to pay me a little for my philanthropic works.

As the days went on, I gradually earned an unusual reputation in Kigali, since the friendly relationship with the Pygmies brought me problems and caused gossip among the Kigalians about my behavior that gave me a reprobate reputation. Neither the Hutus nor the Tutsis understood why I was involved with them that much. I visited their local community thanks to Tharcisse Mugabe, and since the incident on my first day at a Kigali fair, I had won notoriety as an eccentric girl. People felt I was a threat to the local, social standards and tied my strange conduct to the beliefs and lifestyle of my new friends, labeling me loony. Even though nobody noticed me with cigarettes, I could not pacify the public spirit or prevent rumors that I smoked marijuana as my little fellows did innocently, and in consequence, the nicknames creatively soon multiplied across the city.

On a bright and warm, summer afternoon, Dr. Mike took me for a drive in the Red Cross's car by what he dubbed Kigali Rural, which, for me, was nothing but the outskirts of the city. We ended up at the peak of a hill, admiring the breathtaking wonders of a valley that spread over the field whence we had come. Preventing future complaints, I informed him that a hotel was not a proper place for a woman, and as I would spend much time in Kigali, I rented a house, although he did not approve my decision at first.

"It is not right, Dr. Mike. Living in a hotel is quite inconvenient. I am locking myself in a 'Thousand Hills' room all the livelong day to avoid curious people asking me meaningless questions. I do not know how you tolerate this, and besides, I cannot do without a quiet space to welcome friends. Gals need some privacy, sir."

"Dr. Isabelle, living alone in Kigali is not safe for a woman. You will get into trouble, drawing malicious attention to yourself."

"Stop worrying about me, Doctor, because Lieutenant Fred Kaka lent me a gun for my protection."

"Which one?"

"A rifle."

"My stars! You must be kidding me."

"Hahaha. I am joking. He gave me this firearm when I told him I was going to live alone."

I opened my purse and showed him the little toy Lieutenant Fred Kaka had given me, a silver Taurus. When he saw me handling it, his eyes widened.

"Be careful, Dr. Isabelle, please! Do not play with this and point it somewhere else because this thing can go off accidentally."

"No problem, sir. I locked it. Pay attention..."

First, I cocked the pistol, next, I aimed at the target, and then, I fired three shots that broke in half the thin stem of a young grevillea that promptly was swaying in the wind on the summit of the hill. Once the initial scare was over, Dr. Mike applauded me and laughed at my audacity and skill with weapons. He said:

"It was a well-done action of a gun-toting girl. I was wrong about you, Dr. Isabelle. Now I see that Rwanda ought to fear you instead. Every day you do something that surprises me, and I would like to have a daughter like you."

"Creed! I do not need one more zealous father."

Dr. Mike laughed once more, as he was on cloud nine. He looked away thinking what to say, and so did I. He smiled, then.

"Hahaha. That is right, Doc."

In the course of time, our relationship became more complex, meaningful, and even tighter, as he started to have occasional accesses to my thoughts on the privacy of my house, sharing dreams and reality. The nighttime work brought us closer, and in addition, my loneliness in a distant and exotic land highlighted the charms of Dr. Mike, who was always around me. Of course, he was an elegant and imposing person. All of a sudden, our conversation became intimate, and the lovely environment of a bucolic landscape under a Rwandese sunset took over me in a moment I was with conflicting feelings. At the close of the day, when the sun was going down below the horizon, and the evening was pulling the last shreds of light over the hills ahead, I kissed that man for the first time, although I was not sure if it was love or not. I just gave myself to him as Troy had opened its doors to the Greeks. In Africa, he was my counselor, friend, and, from that moment on, a kind of ruler. Besides giving him affection, I was a source of concern, during my adventure in a country that was going into a generalized social upheaval. The

reign of darkness would come to Rwanda, and Apollyon was around the corner on the prowl with his fiery eyes and evil trident ready to tear the world to bits. In contrast, I innocently rested on the ground of a Kigali hill with no idea that such a beastly creature would shortly cover with blood the same glass where I was spilling drops of loving sweat.

III - THE TWAS

Since the late nineteenth century, the deforestation in the Central African and forest degradation have been preventing the Twas from performing their way of life as primitive hunters and extractors of natural resources. Furthermore, the establishment of military training fields and extensive, national parks in response to the world outcry for the environment preservation, forced them to migrate in large numbers to the peripheries of the cities where they live in indigence. Therefore, a great number of them began to subsist on alms, all the more so since they did not have sufficient technical ability to compete against Tutsis and Hutus for jobs. Several Pygmies are still performing services of little value to members of other ethnic groups, and others live in the rented or illegal occupation of land. Only 1.6% of the Twas have adequate arable land for their livelihood and 91% of their individuals are illiterate. A great number of them have no record in the state bureaucracy, what hinders their access to healthcare systems, schools and funding of social programs. Moreover, they have a high infant mortality rate and a short life expectancy, and as a result, few grow to adulthood, and in some communities, about 60% of the Pygmy children cannot reach the fifth year of life. On the other hand, the Hutus and the Tutsis said that the Pygmies were on the margins of society, living in misery for not wanting to interact with the other two hegemonic, ethnic groups, and in addition, they saw the Twas' nomadic lifestyle as a cultural lag. The Twas share the resources they get and they did not accumulate a surplus of hunting.

In the early days of my stay in Kigali, Tharcisse Mugabe invited me to visit the Twas' community, a kind of small village in the rural area of the district. Dr. Mike did not want to go with us, as he had to see, at Chez Lando, President Juvenal Habyarimana, some citizens from the Town Council, and a few radical Hutu politicians of the ruling government party. Therefore, for him to accept my ride, I had to invite Rose, her boyfriend Elizaphan, and Father Jumpe, a missionary who had experience in religious practices with the Pygmies. He was a 42-year-old Angolan, who used to say that was sent to the ghetto by

God to comfort the poor and evangelize the nonbeliever through a pastoral ministry to the needy. Therefore, he believed to be a mediator of affairs and a bridge between Earth and Heaven. Elizaphan was a 29-years-old Hutu peasant of the Good Hope Farm. Even though he and Rose belong to different ethnic groups, they got along well.

I asked Dr. Mike to lend me the Land Rover.

"No, Dr. Isabelle."

"This pickup is not yours, Dr. Mike. It belongs to the Red Cross."

"Will you do any work for the organization?"

"No."

"So, you ought to give up because I will not hand you this car."

I lied, hoping to convince him.

"I will report to the Doctors without Borders on the diseases and the needs of the Twa children."

"Hahaha. Are you going for field research on your own?"

"You are not the only person around here with prestige on the international stage."

Dr. Mike did not lend me the vehicle, and when I was about to quit, Elizaphan proposed a solution.

"Dr. Isabelle, I will ask the truck driver for a ride."

He was not in Kigali only to accompany his fiancée Rose. He was also conducting the supply of the GH Farm's production to the local market. He was tolerant with some stallholders, delivering the products in the morning in advance to get the payment at the end of the afternoon, after their commercialization. That way, he earned a few bucks without knowledge of his employer. I agreed that it was a good way to resolve the problem, since I did not want to accept Dr. Mike's suggestion to postpone the event.

When we reached the village of the Pygmies, a handful of underweight and half-starved children encircled us. Some gathered around me, making me the target of their curiosity, for I did not look anything like them. Some cheekily made crazy faces behind my back, playing tricks on me, and I had to hold my pants so as they did not withdraw them from me with insistent tugs. I probed Tharcisse Mugabe.

"What do these kids want? Why are they grabbing me this way?"

"They are curious, Dr. Isabelle."

"About what, Tharcisse?"

"They are surprised to observe you with this apparel, but they find you beautiful and also exotic."

"Please, ask the kids to stop, Tharcisse. What are they saying?"

"These boys speak Kinyarwanda and Rukiga. Some, depending on experience, know a little of French, and sometimes, they appear in the village speaking a bunch of English words."

"How do they get this parlance?"

"They get used to it on the streets. As they never have an easy start in life, many beg on Kigali especially when they go hungry. This way, they are acquainted with all sorts of folks in the capital."

"Do they beg alone?"

"Yes, Dr. Isabelle. When their parents are not living on alms, they have other duties, and even during childhood, the children panhandle on the streets for their bread."

"Do they go to school?"

"No, doctor. It is rare to see a Twa who reads, writes or calculates even in incipient level. They have to write on earth, sitting together as a group in trees' shades to learn something."

After Tharcisse Mugabe's help, I gave them some spare change, and the thin brats left me alone and I could witness what was going on around me. The thought-provoking scenery was about scarcity, since the impoverished village contained numerous humble, one-room abodes that the Twas cover with banana leaves. They seemed to be burrows of mammals or nests of big birds. The luckier Pygmies had shacks whose walls were made of reeds or thin bamboo sticks intertwined and stuffed with clay. They covered their roofs with straw. The housing structure stretched along a ravine that was the only piece of land whence the Tutsi or Hutu landowners did not expel them. Sadly, I also notice that more than a few Twas wore second-hand clothes that did not fit well.

I questioned the reverend.

"How can there be such poorness at the close of the millennium?"

"Dr. Isabelle, as the world is a wicked environment, I bring the word of The Highest One to the lowly beings."

The cleric decided to preach in the tribe of extremely poor people. At first, I thought it was opportunism and respond.

"Father Jumpe, these unlucky plebeians are not waiting for your prayers. They had gone through so much in their life and are calling for material aid instead?"

"If you intended to bring bread why did you approach a reverend? You should bring the baker to care for the lowborn."

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...

The religious started a lovely service that many in the village sorely accompanied. The Twas did not understand the meaning of the excerpts from the Sermon on the Mount although the unknown words sparked wonder among them. Despite that, worshipping Jesus Christ, they felt something close to their heart, being quiet, just paying touching attention, and I looked back on the teachings of Saint Augustine for whom faith does not need understanding: *credo*

quia absurdum. While they kept their eyes fixed on the figure of the parish priest, I wondered what was going on in the minds of the suffering Twas. Maybe, they believed that they heard the good news, ensuring a journey to a heaven awash with joy in a good and promising future.

And Jesus, seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain, and when he was set, his disciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they, which do hunger, and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

*Glory to God in the highest and to Earth peace!
In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*

The preaching of Father Jumpe amid the hardship of those men was an invitation to the sad, Christian resignation. He appeared to be a zealous collaborator of the Pygmies and helped them to execute an unexpected, economic project, encouraging the Twas to undertake the growing of varieties of flowers for the funeral service in Kigali.

"Let's get a look at them, Doctor."

After the short mass, he and Tharcisse Mugabe guided me to a terrain behind a ravine where the Twas cultivated species of tropical plants.

Those flowerbeds were the most riveting site I have ever been in my entire life so far. Their meaning exceeded a simple garden in that they contributed to supporting such underprivileged community, and they were a sanctuary focused on the hard work of the Enlightened One. The Twas' plantation gave off a beautiful smell. The moths flying over the blooms across the gardens reminded me of the images of the children's tale books that my father read to me when I was a kid.

Tharcisse Mugabe and Father Jumpe explained to me that they had some varieties of tropical blossoms, and the priest with his melodic voice of Gregorian chant said:

"We chose the tropical flowers for cutting, Dr. Isabelle, because they are perennial, beautiful and common in funeral events in Rwanda. We deal only with blooms now, yet we may be also selling seedlings and seeds soon to turn this little country into an immense garden."

"I can feel the holiness to which you referred earlier in your preaching. Good on you, Father Jumpe. Magnificently done."

The religious grabbed my arm and took me with him for a walk by the planting, telling:

"Come on, Dr. Isabelle, I will make a beautiful nosegay for you in gratitude for your devotion to the Twas."

With pruning shears in hand, he worked on collecting samples of each species of flowers across the garden. He gathered them to form a beautiful and a multicolored floral arrangement.

"This small red beauty is an anthurium, a worldwide, commercialized flower."

He banded me an anthurium, and I kissed its petals.

"This red and yellow splendor is the heliconia flower, this plant with leaves that look like the banana ones. We do not know how many types of them exist in the world."

The heliconia joined the anthurium in my hand!

"This is the strelitzia. I appreciate it the most. It is from South Africa, and many people call it bird-of-paradise thanks to its peculiar shape. Many see them as the most beautiful specimens of the world of flowers"

I received the wonderful bird-shaped flower whose beauty is similar to the birds'. It appeared to me that it was ready to switch Kingdoms.

"Look at this ginger flower. It is an Asian-native plant of Java Island, India, and China from where it spread to all tropical areas of the globe. There are two species of this plant: ginger-pineapple, since its inflorescence resembles the pineapple and the ginger-magnificent or beehive because it looks like a construction of bees."

I had in my hands the most beautiful bouquet I have ever seen, and I never thought I would receive it from the hands of an affable priest.

"I have never heard about blooms that are named ginger, Father."

"They do exist. Look at this here, the flower of redemption, which is a species of ginger too."

"This is a refined, reddish flower, sir. I think it is the most beautiful among them."

"Don't rush to conclusions, dear. All flowers you have seen so far are symbolizing the death in this country."

"What do you mean?"

"People are acquiring them to decorate funeral events."

"They have good marketing because of the whole lot of burials of this place, haven't they?"

"Yes, they have, Dr. Isabelle. We embarked on this project to celebrate life through the Divine Creation of nature, but in contrary, we are

marking the spread of pain. I do not know if I am being ethical, going through with this."

"What do you have in mind?"

"I believe in you and admire your kindness. I notice how good you are for the Twas."

"Oh! You are not seriously talking to me."

"Why would I joke, my dearest one?"

"I do not know the first thing about flowers."

"Even so, you care about the Twas, and love is all you need to deal with these anguished people. Trust me that the trade of flowers is an aspect of your medicine. If they do not eat, they die. If they eat poorly, they raise your clinical work."

"It is true, Father. You are insightful."

"I need you to be in this place just sometimes. We already planted the seed, did most of the job, and even knowledge is widespread. Look at this simple and hardworking apprentice, Tharcisse Mugabe. He has a green thumb and already teams with the best technicians. He no longer needs any help."

Father Jumpe took me to a rustic greenhouse where we found abundant potted plants. They appeared to be the most beautiful flowers I had ever seen. I saw some samples of different colors like violet, scarlet, white and pinkish.

"The highlight is in this hothouse, Dr. Isabelle. These beautiful specimens are African violets, flowers that bloom in the vases every morning to scent the environment. Experts consider it an exquisite blossom that is among the most beautiful miniatures of the kingdom. In quite a few places, its name is cape violet, and it exists in various colors such as white, purple, or bicolor with different hues. The African violet was the favorite of the ancient Greeks, and symbol of Athens. The Romans used it in women's fragrances."

After those moments of ecstasy, Tharcisse Mugabe took us to a smoking hot hut where the Twas had built a cottage industry, a small pottery factory. The clay is a tattoo on the Twas' culture. When I arrived at the place, I saw about forty craftswomen sitting or kneeling to work in the molding of clay, manufacturing pots, pans, dishes and other handicrafts. I figured that finding a market for such a batch would be easy, considering the quality and beauty of its objects. They painted an opaque, dark background on them as the basis over which they put colored and cheerful images. I was impressed to contemplate plebs like the Twas making vibrant themed pieces. Their pots, furthermore, expressed the personality of those who do not face the struggles of life as a difficulty in getting their way ahead, and I was sure that the humanity ought to treasure the Pygmy pottery. Men came from the swampy lands of Bugesera with clay, packaging it in wet sheets that they carried on their shoulders.

As it was time for us to leave the settlement, we got in the GH Farm's delivery truck and started the way back to Kigali, and shortly after, when we were taking the road, we crossed with a police convoy that was heading towards the Twa community. From the top of the truck, I saw in a Toyota pickup something that seemed like a huge dead animal. I searched for information.

"What was that in the vehicle?" Elizaphan answered me.

"They passed on the run, but I believe it is a downed gorilla, Dr. Isabelle."

"Why would they take it to the village?"

"I have no idea, Doc."

The Tutsi Rose Kabaguyoi observed.

"I guess the Hutus are trying to find who killed that creature. The gendarmerie is seeking culprits, and it is about to raid these tribes around here. I noticed that gendarmes, park rangers, and paramilitaries are among them, and I believe that the situation back there is getting to be troublesome for our friends."

"As they are a Rwandan flagship species, the law prohibits us to hunt gorillas. Just a single animal is regarded more worthy than the entire population of that village these days." Father Jumpe explained.

"Why, Father?"

"This country gets more money for the gorilla preservation than for the improvement of the 'Twas' health conditions. It is an iconic animal, and the government uses it to raise money to conserve the habitat where it lives. It is also a source of income for some important entrepreneurs through ecological tourism."

"So, let us go back to check if everything is okay."

Elizaphan implored in a mood of utter disbelief in that possibility.

"Jesus on the Cross! You must be nuts, Dr. Isabelle. We ought not to return now because those men are dangerous."

Yet I had already made up my mind.

"The priest put me in charge of caring for the Twas and I am going back. If you do not want to come with me, leave me here. Stop this truck, driver, please."

Just when the men were feeling safe, we heard the sound of gunshots coming from the spot whence we came, and in turn, the driver went fast even more to stay away from danger. On my side, from the top of the truck body, I laid my head on its cab, knocked on it and said:

"Please, break! We must return."

Just when the Tutsi was accelerating the vehicle, we heard other shots, and then, I could not resist.

"Break off this car right now for the passion of God!"

* * * * *

Father Jumpe, hearing the name of Our Lord and seeing the distress of Isabelle, stood up for her, and they returned to the village, finding it crawling with the gendarmerie. On arriving, they saw the police officers cracking down the Twas. Two dead Pygmies were fallen in the courtyard, a man and a woman. They made a lovely couple and left orphans, and the wife died from a knife perforation in her chest because she tried to save her shot dying husband. Mukono had a lesion on his right leg that was not severe and was a little sore. He was sitting on a tree stump, trying to contain the blood flowing from it. Canisous Rubuga headed the Interahamwe with his usual brutality, since he was a stone, cold killer and a violent, born psychopath whom people saw as an embodiment of wickedness. In fact, in a just and orderly society, he would be in a lunatic asylum under drug treatment. He regarded himself as an authentic, dedicated and accomplished Hutu who had a moral duty to fight in defense of his ethnic group, and sadly, by these actions, he acted with excessive brutality as a matter of course and without fear or regret.

* * * * *

The doctor inquired.

"What is going on here? Why are you stabbing these poor people?"

The Hutu leader explained.

"We are acting in the line of duty, serving a warrant for the Twas' arrest."

"What is the charge?"

"We are investigating a homicide case. These Pygmies are suspected of murder"

"I do not believe. Whom did they kill?"

"These vagabonds shot down a mountain gorilla."

Some Twas were breaking into the forest reserves to stock up on game meat, and this led to suspicion that they were behind the killing of gorillas when they occurred. Especially because the Rwandans believed the Pygmies eat everything that moves. However, in reality, they only hunt small rodents and birds for their dinner. The law, moreover, protects the mountain gorilla of the Virunga Volcanic Mountains, a narrow strip of mountainous land between Congo, Uganda, and Rwanda.

"Come on! Don't be absurd! The death of a wild animal cannot be a homicide. It may be brutality or inhumanity and murdering refers to crimes against people."

"It is the same thing for us because it is all about slaying. The gorilla is sacred and legally protected. Killing wild game in the forest is wrong, Doc."

"What right have you got to take a human being's life, then, if you say that the law is the law?" I said irritably.

"These Twas just got away when the police arrived. They are all underhand as fuck, but fortunately, some were held in the act."

The authorities encouraged the arrest of gorilla hunters. The news had come to the world of publishing and finding culprits was a priority issue for the government. In brief, The Hutus tried to shift the blame in the Twas, and as evidence of the crime, the rangers brought small Twas' hunting paraphernalia that they had found in the jungle. Tharcisse Mugabe replied then.

"These traps only do away with small animals and have no effect on a gorilla that size."

"Yes, but if you have hunted in the parks lately, you could be up to something other than killing rats like fighting with big animals to save your ass."

Mukono, who had been silent until then, covered up for his friends, saying:

"These instruments are mine and I myself put them in the woods."

Canisous Rubuga, hearing the confession, headed to the Twa, withdrawing his machete. Nonetheless, Father Jumpe leaped forward and intervened in favor of Mukono, getting between them with a leap of faith in his priesthood to calm down the Hutu.

"You will not kill him, militiaman, as we have seen sufficient deaths of innocent people for today. You know the Twas are above such things, and besides, this chap owned up to have traps to catch rodents, and it has nothing to do with big-game hunting. The offense of violating restricted areas must be subject to written standards, but not to your scythe."

Canisous Rubuga was furious and admonished the priest.

"Get out of the way, Father, because he put himself in. Killing churchmen brings ill fortune. So, let me get on with my work as you go to a church to do yours."

I took the initiative.

"This Pygmy needs care, and he must go to the hospital with no escape, and I promise you he will take what is coming to him in court. Please, ask your superiors to deal with this issue, given that you have missed finding the right solution for it."

At the time, the French trained the militiamen in reserves on the pretext of qualifying park rangers, and so, they ran across the downed gorilla during their training sessions. The Hutu militia chief proposed:

"Okay, Dr. Isabelle, we leave this Pygmy with you just yet, but I have to tell you, he will depart from the hospital straight to a prison to await his trial. If we are not an example on our side, we cannot ask for the counterpart of Congo and Zaire across the reserve. The same care is offered all over the park."

"Don't be dramatic! You have no material evidence against Mukono. Besides, you cannot imprison this person for crimes he did not commit"

"Doctor, they are the most worthless race God put on Earth. They live only on alms."

"They do not get any job offer."

"I bet it is because it takes them twice as long to do something."

"The government does not grant them admission to schools and technical preparation either."

"Please, Doctor. Keep your little beggar with you. We must go because there is much work ahead."

"What is the job? Is it harassing the poor, defenseless Tutsis all day long?"

"If you had brains you wouldn't criticize a militiaman this way. I suggest you not to abandon the KH Center because we lay down the rules on the streets."

"You are not on the street, Canisous Rubuga. Father Jumpe blessed this village with God's words. So, you are desecrating a family sanctuary without permission."

"Take your Pygmies away, Doctor, but be careful not to fall into the trap of drug-taking."

"I thank you for this advice, but I don't have unhealthy habits."

Isabelle made a tourniquet on Mukono's injured leg and took him to the hospital. The death of the couple saddened the villagers, and they were likewise disturbed. Some part of the T'was blamed Mukono for most problems that happened in their village, and by doing so, a group of them was trying to ostracize the indomitable and inconsistent Pygmy, arguing that he made waves and created disagreement among the members of the community. In addition, he was the black sheep of the group and most have already paid for his mistakes. In contrast, some liked him, believing he owned the ancestral religiousness of the former forest inhabitants. Mukono possessed a kind of power that served as an argument for the old and nostalgic villagers to say that he would be the spiritual guide of the Pygmies soon. The Twa was a rare link between the current indigenous lineage and their secular beliefs, interfacing with the world beyond the grave through magic rituals, hallucinations, and use of drugs and herbs that only he knew how to manipulate. Out from the closeness of the jungle, the youngsters were losing their characteristics of collectors and extractors of natural resources, and on that account, the old villagers, despite disapproving Mukono in general, backed him, as he was part of the millennial strain of the legendary Indians. They feared the dispersal of individuals of their ethnicity. Furthermore, Mukono was brave and not afraid of danger, and he did not deny his forestry roots or his Pygmy heritage.

* * * * *

When I got to the hospital, Dr. Mike was on the lookout for me seeing the clock ticking. He sounded nervous about my safety because the bad news that the outlaws had gone to the village of the 'Twas to fulfill an order of arrest had left him worried. We almost came across the doctor on the road, since he was heading with the Land Rover to the Pigmies' community. As I had to start medical procedures to clean and suture the leg of Mukono, I looked for help.

"Would you be kind enough to give me a hand, Dr. Mike?"

"No, Dr. Isabelle, I'm sorry. This elusive, little thief is your business, and he is not worth two cents. I am somewhat sure I have already mentioned it to you. Fortunately, his wound is not serious, and you can easily assume this task with Miss Kabaguyoi. I also advise you that the Pygmies are a shitload of trouble and sooner or later you will know."

The English doctor, carrying on with his vexing mantra just to rile me up drove me up the wall, and I had made a vow I would not put up with his nonsense anymore.

"Please, give me a break and stop grumbling, Doctor. Spare me your deep philosophical comments because I already heard a sermon today. Have a nice day!"

I went into the hospital with Rose, and we improvised a surgery room to treat Mukono. Everything went average, and to be on the safe side, I deliberately sedated him intravenously in order that he deeply slept for various hours. When I left and came to the front of the hospital, two militiamen were across the street, under the podocarp, unsettling Tharcisse Mugabe on his little retail outlet. They came straight to me.

"Where is the criminal, Doc? We brought the cuffs."

"Which one?"

"The Twa Mukono. We came to pick him up."

Exaggerating the health condition of the Twa in an attempt to reverse their intention, I emphasized:

"You want to take him to prison, don't you? Unfortunately, I will not discharge him from this hospital because he needs continual care and supervision. Besides, he has a serious, rare disease, and he just slipped into a coma. This inpatient is under sedation with the influence of strong medicines, since he has a nasty infection in his right leg and will not wake up soon. In brief, you cannot transfer him unless using a sophisticated ambulance because he would die in the next minute we turned off the devices connecting him to life. Moreover, as a doctor, I am obliged to alert you that he's got a highly, contagious, viral disease from the jungles, and if I were you, I would not breathe deeply beside him without wearing a protective mask."

"They didn't tell us that the case would be so serious, and as far as we know he just has a kid boo-boo on his leg."

"You are kidding me, aren't you? He is very ill, and speaking of that, show me the arrest warrant, please."

* * * * *

The paratroopers did not understand the extent of a serious, rare disease. Nevertheless, they noticed by the doctor's expression that it would not be good for them. They also did not know what an arrest warrant was, but even so, they saw that the American medical personnel wanted a notarized proof like a piece of paper with some writing on it. Under the circumstances, they wised up that they were getting into a tricky situation that required a different treatment. First, they had guessed that they would find a receptive environment with an earlier agreement on the arrest of the Twa, but instead of this, things were not going well. Nobody, furthermore, ordered them to use brute force in the case. Then, they stepped aside and spoke a little in whispers to each other, deciding that the best thing to do was go away and only talk to Canisous Rubuga the day after, since he was in the red-light district, supposedly, drunk in the arms of his favorite prostitute Anne-Marie Kenyama and would not miss them that night.

The Twa slipped away from trouble for the nth time in his life. The sinister and dangerous situations and the outstanding ways he avoided them raised his charisma and mystique among the Pygmies, and hundreds believed that Mukono was unbreakable and no calamity could finish him off.

* * * * *

As time went by, I realized that Father Jumpe had discovered an unorthodox way to profit from seizing the knowledge about herbs that Mukono and his wife Domitilla possessed. While he was a smart Pygmy, she was a matriarch, counselor, healer, and midwife of the Twas.

On one occasion, I complained to the priest and asked him to have any compassion for the poverty of others.

"Aren't you ashamed, Father Jumpe? You are using theological tricks to cash in on the Twas' credulity and ignorance."

"I have just received some empirical observations from Domitilla and Mukono, dear."

"I want to know the whole of this. You get money for it, don't you?"

"For Christ! I do not gain much in this errand of mercy. I am just moonlighting on the behalf of a pharmaceutical rep who works for some European laboratories."

"Why doesn't this freeloader come here and enter the jungles as Mukono does?"

"He's very busy. Moreover, getting in the forest parks is dangerous."

"How much money have you received up to now? We will pass their share."

"A soldier of God does not look for earthly goods."

Father Jumpe was a benevolent, religious man, but not even a tiny bit over than this, and I knew he was lying and exploiting the good will and ingenuity of the couple of sorcerers. I did not care about his self-interest at first, yet as I was gradually raising my contacts with the Twas, I noticed that the plants they had cataloged in their minds could contain ingredients of outstanding value to the world of pharmacology and its entrepreneurs.

"Do not bring that up, you capitalist abbot."

"Dr. Isabelle, you are insightful. I feel for Dr. Mike in your hands. Hahaha."

Once, at night in my residence, he insinuated that he smuggled plants and insects with substances that were resistant to pests or auxiliary ingredients to combat some types of diseases.

"Please, consider the question and think about what you have to do, Dr. Isabelle. I am sincerely discussing it with you at the request of my superiors now that your father watches the paths you're heading down, and he came to me through some documents we left behind. This means that he threatened to report me unless you confirm to him that our friendship is not harmful."

"Did daddy tell you that?"

"Each word, clear as a bell. In addition, he instructed me to clarify the question and take you to phone him. In short, he put a noose around my neck."

"Now then! Did he dare?"

"Yes, he did. Your father is a smart politician."

I sided with Father Jumpe against dad. My father had promised to let me lead my life on my own, but once again, he showed his inability to free my daily existence.

"Lately, I've been meaning to tell you everything about this, yet I was awaiting the right time to do it."

"What is it about, Father? I am all ears."

The Angolan Father Jumpe explained:

"My customers are satisfied with Mukono's work, although that little warlock is unaware of the scope of his doings."

"That's a dirty trick. You are a manipulator!"

"I do my best to live in the likeness of God. Please, look on the bright side, Dr. Isabelle."

"I am anxious to observe something good in your sacred greed. So, get to the point, please."

"Mukono is nothing but a rude and boyish man, although people say that he uses to break the law and easily get rid of problems. I am sure that he has been acquitted of several alleged crimes and is still alive because of our interference in his favor before the authorities. Moreover, he could be rotting behind bars or resting in a shallow, unmarked grave if we had not hired good lawyers to defend him in some instances. My employers, who support some politicians in this country, have already reversed some arrest warrants against him."

"Why doesn't your boss place Mukono in a comfortable house and legally hire him?"

"Our technicians talk to the Twa around Congo and Burundi, as Mukono is evasive and do not stay still. They say that the Twa is useful only like a diamond in the rough, and if he discovers that he is in a business, he will stop whatever he is doing. Perhaps, he helps Tharcisse Mugabe to sell potted blooms in front of the hospital, and you will have not only one, but two Twas in love, Dr. Isabelle."

"Hahaha. All right, let's keep this secret, but I am watching you for the welfare of my acquaintances. God keeps you!" As I wanted to rest, I waved goodbye to him.

"Please, wait, Dr. Isabelle! We have no time to waste."

"I guess you are up to no good, Father."

"Don't jump to conclusions, my dear. We must run to a phone."

"Forgive me, Father, but I must sleep."

"No, Doctor, let's move!"

"Why?"

"Good Lord! Sometimes, you look slow on the head like a Twa."

"Please, do not insult us. Whom are we going to call?"

"You have to speak to your father over a telephone. Only you can settle this all with him."

"Where are we going to find a phone at this late hour?"

"We shall find a unit in an appropriate place."

I left the comfort of my house to find an intact payphone. It was a hard task in Kigali those days. Father Jumpe was anxious that I contacted the senator and guided him to stop digging into that issue. I was with him in his vehicle, driving through some neighborhoods of the city without, and thus, he questioned me.

"What about using the phone unit of the hospital, Dr. Isabelle?"

"Are you crazy? We cannot place an overseas call from there."

"Why not? This is an emergency, my goodhearted, dear friend."

"Emergency what, Father? I am dealing with your interest, but not with a case of general significance."

After driving around, we ended up in a strange spot where we set up the phone call. We were on hold for long, hoping to contact the American operator and, in the interim, people started to crowd in, pushing the site until the streets were teeming with life. Seeing women with provocative clothes and men with drinks in hand, talking to one another, shamelessly, I noticed that we were in a lively and noisy area of prostitution. Immediately, our presence stood out. Priest Jumpe, therefore, looked at me regretfully for having brought us to a sinful place on the brink of perdition. In his eagerness to take it up with the US senator, the religious man did not realize the mess he got himself into. Then, a prostitute approached us speaking a vulgar language to complain against me.

"Hey, daddy's girl, can't you see this is a public phone? Get out there and let others use that fucking device."

I did not pay attention to her, given that I was trying to connect to the United States. The woman, however, stood inflexibly and kept on swearing at me.

"Cross-creed! Stand back, white bitch. Are you done with the phone?"

Father Jumpe did not feel good in such circumstances and was eager to go away. Additionally, he knew I was reputed to have a distressing mood. Thus, once fearing that a dissension between the insolent girl and I could drag us into trouble, he suggested:

"Come with me, Dr. Isabelle! Let's stop this falling-out and find a working phone in a saner place."

"It was a long way to come here, Father, and I will only leave this shit hole when I'm done."

"Go with the father, cock teaser! Aren't you afraid of being beaten? Is the Thousand Hills hiring American sheilas now?" She noticed my New York accent.

I could not tolerate her insulting words and answered properly. Until then, I had been afraid of nothing, and it meant that such an evil witch would not be one to frighten me.

"Stop that, goddamn girl! This line is out of order."

"Put down that phone! Are you deaf? I'm sick to death of your attitude." She tried to drag me by the arm.

Two other ugly women approached, the offenses became harsher, and the prostitute who had arrived first got full of herself. Even though I was not afraid of them, Father Jumpe was sweating, begging me to leave because he was foreseeing violence.

Jesus, take the wheel!

I got the talk to my daddies in New York.

"Mom, the senator is forcing me to leave Rwanda, and then, I will go to another country to start from scratch. It will take a little longer to get back home."

"What is he doing, darling? In the last few days, I noticed he has that look of someone who is up to something. You know how it is, don't you?"

"Sure, I do, Mom. Please, control him."

"Well, well, well! You do not say so. Just leave it up to me, honey, because we promised to let you on your own."

The women laughed and mocked me in a clear English speech.

"Papa, send me my bottle! Hahaha. Mama, tell dad that I will give my pussy to someone with a huge dick! Hahaha."

As I was losing patience with those inconvenient girls, I put the phone on the hook and addressed the most daring of them, trying to pay back the insults.

"Damn you! Get out of my sight, slutty creature!"

Yet when I held the Father Jumpe's hand and started walking away from the evil street, the worst of them said for the sake of talking.

Had daddy already fucked your tight ass today, Mommy?

Chaos reigned!

I blew my top, what was a hint of trouble, and I land a punch on the ogress, making her falls flat on the floor. The other two pounced on me, and we came to blows, starting a noisy, womanly street fight. Hutus and Tutsis crowded around, laughing and stirring up the strife whereas Father Jumpe tried to break it. When he held a bully the others caught me, and the fight broke out over again. With an exceedingly fast strike, an opponent grabbed and knocked me down to hug my body lasciviously. She started coiling herself, squeezing my breath out as if a boa constrictor were preying on me. The others took advantage to strike me harder. I had never shrunk back from any woman's harangue and I had vitality and the wish to put up a fight against those tramp bitches who blasphemed the memory of my mother. By contrast, Father Jumpe just shouted.

"Goodness me, Dr. Isabelle! Ladies, calm down, please.
Somebody helps me to reconcile these women!"

Suddenly, another courtesan fiercely jumped at us, taking my side, and the situation that was unfavorable, leaned into me, making me put a great onslaught of punches on my foes immediately. One of the brawlers took a bottle of primus and crashed it on the head of my companion, making her bleed. Another aggressor stoned my partner when she fell senseless to the

ground. However, I kicked this rude girl knocking her out. Then, on seeing that his beloved streetwalker was injured, Canisous Rubuga drew a revolver and fired three shots aiming at a spot without people, scattering the crowd. Screaming, he chased away the three rowdy women too. Their friends took them to safe places somewhere in the rear of the buildings along the street.

"Holy shit! Enough of this dispute, Anne-Marie. I cannot step away for a moment."

Although Anne-Marie Kenyama was dizzy, she could speak normally.

"Those three truck stop sluts were laying into this girl, and I do not take cowardice."

"Did you help this woman just because of this?"

* * * * *

Canisous Rubuga guessed that his girlfriend had gotten into trouble because of a previous misunderstanding with one of the hookers. She was insanely jealous when any woman approached him. Above all, another fact also motivated her: a prostitute was snooping around some clandestine activities of Anne-Marie, who was a Rwandan Patriotic Front informant.

Anne-Marie Kenyama was a 27-years-old Tutsi from the exile in Uganda, and the tough routine of life in a refugee camp made her psychologically strong. She hated the Hutus since her infancy when she saw some of them killing her family, and from then on, with unhappy scenes stamped in her memory, she accumulated more and more rancor as the years counted down. A long time before, she had vowed revenge and spotted the opportunity siding with the Rwandan Patriotic Front in its effort to overthrow the Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana. She knew that her life would worth nothing if the hooker associated her to the Ugandan, Tutsi rebels.

The affair between Anne-Marie and Canisous Rubuga was a way she easily gets information about the militant group's routine and reports on the progress of the French, military work in Rwanda. During his drunkenness, the Hutu gave her important news, letting her know the whole schedule of the training that the French provided to the Hutus in the north forest reserves. One day, he talked to her about this subject.

"Only think! Do you mean you are training to become a ranger?"

"I will nurse the animals, Anne-Marie. Hahaha."

During a booze-up, Canisous Rubuga commented:

"Anne-Marie, we are planning to murder the Tutsis."

"What's new in that? You do it each single day."

"No, this time, things will be bigger."

Over the days, Anne-Marie developed the ability to preview when he was about to reveal privileged information, and on such occasions, she

listened to him, even when he was speaking foolishness. She served him another glass of primus.

"We have a project to exterminate all the cockroaches."

"What a horror! You are delirious, Canisous Rubuga."

"No, Anne-Marie. The senior militaries are discussing the case to solve answer these questions. They are spotting, counting and registering the Tutsis and sympathizers."

"Do you intend to take everyone to concentration camps?"

"There's a good chance we do it. I do not have all the details on this subject."

She passed on this information to the base of operations of the Rwandan Patriotic Front. This was the first time that the Tutsis heard someone talking so convincingly about the architecture of that project. They took the issue seriously and enhanced intelligence work, and from that moment on, the fighting intensified. The commander Kagame, the Tutsi guerrilla leader, noticed it was time to roll up his sleeves and step up to have that conflagration done. He remarked dryly:

Living is bumping against the future. Either we go to it or it returns to pick us up!

The case between the two of them was convenient because, under its shelter, she was not compelled to go to bed with all sorts of johns from the brothels. In doing so, she kept herself away from dangerous sexual contacts in the promiscuous environment, lowering the risk of contracting AIDS. Some of her peers were HIV positive, and from time to time, she saw someone transmitting the disease through unsafe relationships.

She didn't want to get an old joe!

All men who frequented the red-light district feared to stick with Anne-Marie, since she was the girl of the Interahamwe leader, a violent and jealous man. In turn, he appreciated keeping Anne-Marie all to himself, even though she was a woman of the night because this gave him prestige among his fellows. He dreamed of getting Anne-Marie out of the gutter and put her in a comfortable residence away from the dirty cathouses, providing her a decent life. Two reasons prevented this categorically, however. First, being a Hutu leader, he could not get along well with his colleagues, taking a marital status with a Tutsi, and second, he did not want to embarrass his wife, having a Tutsi, gold digger as an assumed lover affair outside wedlock. He seemed to love both and this dilemma pushed him to be a violent person, giving voice to his rage. His spouse did not pleasure him at home, and the slut with whom he dated

outside the familial conviviality could not be all his and give him the feelings she had inside.

Anne-Marie and Canisous Rubuga had a love-hate relationship, although mutual acquaintances implied they hit it off when they met for the first time. They both wanted to injure the lineage of the other, but even so, if they had fled the country, they would have tranquility to live a normal life together. Unfortunately, in Rwanda of those days, they would not have any royals. As he was a paramilitary member and she was a guerrilla, it was expected that there would be a moment when one would draw and fire quicker than the other did.

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Canisous Rubuga fired three shots that compelled the crowd to run away and we stopped the confusion. The Hutu only had eyes for his Tutsi. For my part, I was sitting on a sidewalk with my back to a wall when Father Jumpe approached and pulled me aside. Seeing the head wound of Anne-Marie, I approached her to provide any possible help and thank her intervention on my behalf. Without her by my side, the three whores would have hit me a little more.

"Creed! What a fine friend you are, Father."

"My beloved dame, I am a man of God. Everything went all haywire fast and I was wondering what to do for you when the Hutu turned up shooting at random."

"It is okay. No hard feelings for now. Take my first aid suitcase in the car and bring it over here, please."

"What for, my dearest friend? We should avoid being in this creepy place."

"No, Father! There are hurt victims bleeding around here?" I explained to him that a doctor is constantly under oath.

Canisous Rubuga was worried about the injury in the head of his lover. Even so, he did not want me to touch her.

"No, Dr. Isabelle. Please, leave us alone because there is nothing the matter with her, and I'll straighten this out."

"That beats all! Let us do it the way you think best, but please, take my first aid kit and go ahead because luckily it contains all necessary support for a small surgery. Suture the wound and do not hit any vital artery."

"Do I have to put stitches in her head, Dr. Isabelle?"

"Yes, you do. Hurry up because she is wasting precious time."

"What about this vital artery?"

"A man in Gitarama got this artery ruptured and lost his vision, voice, and movements ten seconds after the doctor's error."

I smiled secretly mocking the ignorance of the Hutu. After this talk, I headed for the vehicle of Father Jumpe, and when I got in, the man shouted, beckoning me.

"Don't get me wrong, Dr. Isabelle, but come to do your job, please. You can go away just in a while!"

I knew he would give up at the last minute. He was an ignorant Hutu who had hardly attended school in childhood and possessed his prominent position in the barracks not thanks to intelligence. Consequently, a resigned Hutu walked back to a nearby bar to keep on drinking his warm beer. I examined Anne-Marie, put a dressing on her head to stop the bleeding and decided to take her to the hospital, for she had taken a strong hit, and I intended to be sure by a tomography if she had another bruising. The Tutsi was dazed.

"Come on, Father Jumpe!"

"Where are we going?"

"We have to go to the Hospital Center because I must submit this woman to a few routine tests."

"Are they needed, Dr. Isabelle?"

"Yes, they are indispensable, Father. I never got in your pastoral duties. Have I ever taught you how to pray?"

"No, you have not... That is right, honey." He acquiesced resigned. "What a night!"

I put it in plain words to the Tutsi.

"Listen, I have to take you to the hospital. Are you getting it?"

Anne-Marie could not understand me well, as she got the worst of it, and the bump on the head made her groggy. I swore to myself that I would do everything in my power to alleviate the suffering of that colleague, since she was stoned in my stead. As I was not sure if I could have borne such a strong blow, and I was grateful for being unscathed. It was best not to let Dr. Mike get wind of anything about those facts. Yet when at high night we arrived at the entrance of the CHK, the Englishman was eagerly waiting for us with an angry face and an icky mood flowing from a restless attitude. He stared at us and unleashed his first wrath against Father Jumpe.

"Father Jumpe, how could such a saintly creature take Dr. Isabelle to hang around an area of the oldest profession? Just you, who seem to be a devout papist, are succumbing to orgiastic affairs. What a disappointment! You ought to be ashamed of attending that den of doom!"

"Hold your horses, sir! I do not go into low company. Dr. Isabelle and I went to that place to use a phone. As a friend of the president of this country, you could ask him to improve telecommunications in Rwanda."

Dr. Mike fished for information.

"*Who* did you call for?"

"No comment! This does not concern you, Doctor. Besides being grumpy, are you nosy too?"

During the trip to the hospital, for the sake of appearances, the priest had begged me to keep quiet about the reason that led us to a public telephone handset that time of night. *Keep your mouth shut!* As my father's name was in the case, I would not say anything. I knew some nebulous political issues in which daddy participated, and in these cases, I just kept to myself. Dr. Mike appealed to me.

"What in God's name were you doing in that place, Dr. Isabelle?"

"We tried something to entertain ourselves, Dr. Mike. Priest Jumpe and I were drinking a couple of cold ones to relax a little."

The doctor could not resist my poker face and laughed, seeing me lying cynically that way.

"Hahaha. No kidding! Were you drinking beer and slapping hoochie mamas? What was the cause of the dust-up? Did Father Jumpe refuse to pay for any dame? Hahaha."

Father Jumpe censured the English doctor and his upset words.

"Please, do not be insolent and offensive, Dr. Mike. I cannot see where that is your business."

Then, a nurse came to me, saying that she had walked Anne-Marie into the emergency ward and everything was ready for the small surgery. Therefore, I went in and said goodbye to Father Jumpe and Dr. Mike.

The disquiet with the prostitutes amounted to some impulsive mistakes I made in Kigali, contributing to the highlight my reputation of being dotty. I was a funky and uninhibited woman, who surprised the Kigalians, and even worse, my loose and informal way to dress up and the sloppy practice of hair care created an adverse visual to the local society and by doing it, I was the subject of gossips. Some Rwandans loved me, and others hated me, for I was able to die for my friends and kill my foes. In short, I could not ease myself when I was disturbed. Oddly enough, many Rwandese understood and tolerated this outburst with complacency or even admiration. After all, they experienced a conflicted epoch when being alive or dead, in many cases, was merely a matter of chance. They saw, moreover, the bravery I expressed as a virtue in a hostile environment like Rwanda. Even Dr. Mike used to pronounce that my qualities made me well suited to living in that society, fitting myself to its craziness, naturally.

"I hope you can accept my apologies, Dr. Isabelle."

"Why, Dr. Mike?"

"I tried to convince you to refuse this Rwandan project."

"You did not discuss the question with me. You just tried to push me out of your team once I had already decided to stay."

"All that is it quite over now, and I apologize all the same for this."

"What do you mean, Dr. Mike? Come to the point, please."

"First, I was afraid you could get hurt in Rwanda, but..."

"But...?"

"I have to back down because now I know this country cannot take you, Dr. Isabelle... Hahaha. Have you ever seen an American physician getting into a fistfight, exchanging punches and kicks with three hookers in Kigali downtown? Hahaha."

"Don't be insulting and hateful, Dr. Mike!"

He knew she reddened when was upset.

"Please, calm down! I don't want to take a Kung Fu too. Hahaha."

"I don't see what's so funny! I am sorry, but I need to go home, sir."

I left the hospital and rode home to sleep, given that I was exhausted and needed a little privacy. The Englishman stayed in the hospital, making small talks with other listeners in front of all eyes, disconcerting or perhaps dishonoring me. On walking away, I heard his known mocking laughs.

"Hahaha."

Five days after this episode, a hunter ran across one of the three prostitutes dead in a hilltop close to Kigali. Immediately, everyone believed I had hired a gunman to kill her. The other two were gone too. I think that they fled, given that they feared to be the next ones to die. In fact, I do not know if someone shot the other courtesans dead, as nobody had ever found their corpses. Maybe, they went to another house of ill repute far from Rwanda. Anne-Marie reported to the Tutsis that the nosey girl had discovered she was an Inkotanyi sympathizer and threatened to tell this to Canisous Rubuga. Knowing that a slut had the goods on an RPF spy was sufficient for the guerrillas to murder the unlucky woman. The Tutsis thought she could find some advantages in letting the secret out. Actually, I do not know if Anne-Marie sentenced to death the rival for fear of threats or for jealousy. Lamentably, I did not convince anyone of my innocence. Although neither Dr. Mike nor Rose believed me, my close friend Tharcisse Mugabe stayed at my side. He was not worth as a point in my favor, since he would swear on his eyes just to please me. Strangely, people thought it was fair for me to have paid someone to assassinate the three Tutsi prostitutes. In spite of deeming me responsible, they saw no crime in killing do-nothing women or worthless harlots. In summary, I had acted in accord with the local practices in that sin city in a severe year of war.

IV - THE HUTU POWER

Once, Dr. Mike invited me to a festive dinner in a distinct Kigali club to which the Rwandese elite would appear. It was a unifying ceremony for militants of the NRMD (National Revolutionary Movement for Development), the political party of President Juvenal Habyarimana. The event marked the launch of the government's policy platform for 1994. When we arrived, some beautiful Hutu girls who were dressed to the nines formally welcomed and accompanied us to a huge central table of guests. Ministers, upper-level civil servants, journalists, militaries and ambassadors of allied nations occupied almost every seat.

The arrogant general Gedeon Bagirubwira and his family were beside us. His children's behavior annoyed him, as they were kidding around, moving in and out of the hall, what unnerved him, and therefore, he blamed his wife.

"I told you, woman, not to bring the kids to this event. Go there and calm them because the president is coming to this place."

The general's wife, a distinct, stout woman, stood up with great difficulty and went to gather her children to talk them down. Even so, they did not assume proper manners. She did this task twice more, chasing them across the great space to the dismay of General Bagirubwira, who, seeing no other solution to his boys, resolved to arrest them. He sent someone to call Lieutenant Fred Kaka.

"Lieutenant, keep the kids out of this hall and look after them until the dinner ends."

"What about the event security, General? I am responsible for it."

"So, add my children to your security report that I want on my desk early tomorrow. Why the sad face? Cheer up, Lieutenant, because everything will be okay. Now, get back to work."

The luckless Lieutenant Fred Kaka spent much of the night babysitting the army brats. He seemed to wish to be away in a combat action against the rebels of the RPF rather than with the tireless juvenile delinquents. Moments later, President Juvenal Habyarimana showed up with an entourage of bodyguards around him, leading everyone to stop what they were doing. Some politicians spoke on a stage extravagantly decorated with garlands and arrangements of African violets, heliconias, anthuriums, gingers and strelitzias of Tharcisse of Mugabe. The president made a quite edifying speech in a conciliatory tone with the Tutsis. In contrast, General Gedeon was harsh in his criticism of the opposing ethnicity. I commented to Dr. Mike.

"The president touched on the subject of peace and his words filled me with new hope that this conflict will end in a short while."

"Do not get your hopes up, Dr. Isabelle, because these promises easily result in fantasy."

"What do you mean?"

"As this country cannot guarantee to the international community a quick victory over the rebels, the president signals the commitment of both sides to a peace agreement. This way, he slows down a little the nervousness in the Rwandan economy, and investors devote some of their money to this country."

"I understand, Dr. Mike, but it is a pity. You remind me of my father's talking. Hahaha."

The president came to sit at our table and chose a seat on the other side, distant from us. I was waiting for a chance to talk to him and found aid to the Twas, as they needed social policies, including material help and legal support to equate them with other citizens. They necessitated identification documents and health cards, which offered them access to the public network. I would also ask him to end illiteracy, creating schools for the Twas, making some of them able to lift themselves out of poverty. He had to allow them access to the forest parks in order that they exerted hunting and extracting, their traditional livelihood. Lamentably, Dr. Mike did not let me approach the president, touching an inappropriate subject for the occasion, and he argued, questioning the obstinacy of my observations.

"You cannot talk all that over, saying such things directly to the president, Dr. Isabelle."

"Why not? Could I know?"

"You have to exhaust the intermediate legal means through the official channels, before accessing him. This can't be so, even more in public."

"Which are these?"

"The public service, its brass, and the way through the bureaucracy, Doctor."

"Hahaha. Great joke, Dr. Mike! These thieving bureaucrats don't even buy sufficient medicine for us to treat their relatives. They will never help the Twas."

He was judgmental.

"Oh, Dr. Isabelle! Do not blame these people. It is not polite of you, since they, kindly, invited us to this party. Please, join an NGO to do social work and let His Excellency have a calm dinner. He has got a war to concern about."

"You are a bastard and a vile Nazi, Dr. Mike! How can't you show concern for the plight of the Pigmies in this country? Stretch out a helping hand and have mercy on the needy, at least once in your life."

"Please, do not be ingrate! I do a worthy job for the Rwandese. Unfortunately, this country is an intolerant state divided into castes. On that account, I have to realize our work without self-interest or ethnic choices. If it is not so, I lose credibility with the constituted authority. What can I do for the

paupers if I go against the ruling power? If you wanted to fix this place by force, you should have brought Batman to this party instead of me."

"Yeah! I understand you, Dr. Mike, and you are coherent. Even so, I am not like you, and I hate injustice. I cannot act by the edges with such diplomacy as you do. I will not talk to the president, so be cool, as I promised you to be good tonight."

"I appreciate your comprehension, Dr. Isabelle. It is on the agenda and the government is seeking a solution now that this theme is under debate abroad." He spoke, sounding unconvinced.

The hosts served us a lovely meal, and I saw an abundance of eating that I did not find in other spots of the city. Then, I felt uncomfortable, remembering that my outpatients, barely, had a protein molecule to put on their tongue at home. Anyway, the music of an African band began to enliven the environment, breathing life into the party, everyone started drinking, and joy spread all over the place. Dr. Mike and General Gedeon Bagirubwira were with a bunch of politicians and militaries around the president, chatting away happily. The men laughed loudly and consumed bottles and bottles of pure scotch. Because of a few words with the Kigalians, Dr. Mike left me at the mercy of indiscreet and drunk men. Making things worse, the high-society women avoided me. They looked at me whispering to each another in the corners as I passed by. Then, a white man who had stood looking at me since I arrived, realizing that I was alone, approached, speaking clean and nostalgic French.

"*Bonsoir, Mademoiselle* Isabelle, my name is Pierre Raynaud. Would you like to dance?"

* * * * *

Isabelle looked at the Frenchman and saw his bright and pleading blue eyes staring at her. In addition, the romantic music getting into her ears, his fancy way of saying hello, and the ungraceful attitude of Dr. Mike opened her heart, broke the ice and led her to say okay. Then, they started a good, slow and romantic cheek-to-cheek dance, sliding across the ballroom and swaying to the music, since Monsieur Raynaud was a skillful partner. On the contrary, Dr. Mike sadly looked at the couple from a distance, and as the green-eyed monster ate his heart peace by peace, General Bagirubwira, under the effect of generous doses of whiskey, mercilessly made fun of the situation, pointing the conversation at the American girl.

"Wow! Look at that! From the looks of things, your gynecologist put on her dancing shoes to go to Paris, my friend. Hahaha."

Dr. Mike absorbed the joke contemplatively while the general looked at the Franco-American couple on the dance floor and passed his hand through the ash-blond physician's hair. Meanwhile, pretending not to notice what happened at the men's table, Isabelle waved at them, letting the fuss

increases. In fact, she thought it was a fair punishment, since her boyfriend was treating politics and trying to buddy up with news Hutus just to drink a little more. He inopportunely left her in the lurch.

"I am not an expert on the topic, but apparently she is cheating on you, Doc. People say that the British are cuckolds. Hahaha."

The men were talking.

"Geez! He is kissing her neck."

"Heads will roll!"

"That French dude is a pervert. Rumor has it that he has already fucked twenty bimbos this month only."

With great delight, General Gedeon Bagirubwira contemplated the awkward situation of his English friend. Laughing loudly, he tried to arm Dr. Mike, jokingly.

"Poor, poor, Londoner, I do sympathize. Take this pistol and gun that Frenchman down. He is necking your *femme fatale*. So, show your work, bloke!"

Everyone in the group:

"Hahaha."

* * * * *

Burning with jealousy, Dr. Mike moved away from the indiscreet Hutus to sit at the table in the same spot where he had been beside me earlier. About an hour had elapsed since the moment I started dancing. In the meantime, we talked about France and the United States, sharing memories. The Frenchman knew my country, as he had studied in the USA, and this fact helped our dialogue.

"I was looking forward to meeting you, Isabelle."

"Dr. Isabelle, for now, please, sir."

"I am sorry. Suit yourself, Dr. Isabelle."

"You are welcome."

"You are well known in Kigali, and maybe through the whole Rwanda. You have gained notoriety despite your short residence time."

"What the world calls notoriety I would qualify as gossip."

"Hahaha. Yes, Doctor. If you think so."

"Gossipers are all the same in Rwanda or anywhere else."

"Please, forgive me. It seems to be a point you do not like."

"I am grateful for your understanding."

He questioned me, jokingly, then.

"How could you beat two militiamen at once?"

"I didn't do it. In fact, I only defended myself. Fortunately, I am a bit skillful, and most of their punches and kicks did not land. People make up stories. Who is responsible for these lies?"

He knew she was quick-tempered.

"Hahaha. Do not be mad at me, please, since I do not want to face your mood."

"I would not hurt a gentleman."

"We slapped them, Dr. Isabelle, because they crossed the line, having the audacity to attack a lady like you."

"Who did this on my account?"

"The French military. I am Colonel Pierre Raynaud."

"Is France involved in this armed conflict?"

"France and China are supplying the government with arms."

"Which side are you on?"

"In theory, we don't help anybody, but in practice, we uphold the interests of the Hutu regime, which is one of our allies in global geopolitics issues."

"Is it just because of this?"

He gave her an excuse for France, blaming England instead.

"I don't know for sure, as I am not good at politics, but I think the English are supporting the Tutsi, which is a sound reason for the French stand by the Hutus."

"I do not see the British around these parts."

"They might be behind the scenes in Uganda from where the Tutsis come to attack the Hutus."

"How do you support the Hutus?"

"We run a cooperation policy, training the Rwandese military and the militias."

"Good grief! Are you creating such devils?"

"No, Dr. Isabelle. We do not determine their thinking, given that the application of their skills is a task of the autonomy of this country."

"That doesn't exempt you from any blame."

"Rich countries have programs of military aid to the poor ones. If we do not do it, another nation will perform this."

"Are you training the Interahamwe?"

"Yes, Dr. Isabelle. The Hutu militia is an armed political force as many others that exist worldwide. It is drawing attention now because Rwanda is in a state of war when some violent actions are necessary."

"Can slaying Tutsis indiscriminately be fair?"

"The militia attacks only those against whom they have strong evidence of collaboration with their aggressors. Thousands of Tutsis in this country want the Rwandan Patriotic Front to win this war and are doing something in this regard."

"You are a smooth talker, Monsieur Raynaud. If you persist in this argument, you will convince me to join the Interahamwe and pick up the biggest machete nearby to cut the throat of people, beginning with that one."

Fiddling with my forefinger, I pointed to the place where the president and General Juvénal Habyarimana were.

"Hahaha. You are witty."

* * * * *

After some time, Isabelle returned to her table where she found Dr. Mike drunk and jealous. The Frenchman greeted him also, although he was making the doctor pay the price for being a womanizer. As Pierre Raynaud used to observe the doctor having affairs with more than a few girls, he did not treat Isabelle as an exclusive Dr. Mike's partner, and additionally, to make matters worse, the Londoner noticed this too.

* * * * *

"Take a little walk and find a Hutu woman to be with you, French militiaman? Can't you see that Dr. Isabelle has company tonight?"

"Hahaha. I am not of militias, colleague. Don't be so humorous."

"Get a Tutsi house to burn down because the night is ending."

"Sir, I respect your condition at this moment, but even so, I could take it as an insult."

"So it is an insult. So what?"

"You would not like to feel the rage of a French officer."

"Go to hell you and your machetes!"

The discord between the two tensed up, making me surprised to witness men about to fight for a woman. Although I tried to calm down Dr. Mike, the drunkenness had already dominated his thinking.

"Gentlemen, let us act civilly and keep our discussion on a friendly basis because this disagreement is ridiculous."

The doctor continued to criticize Colonel Pierre Raynaud.

"Please, Dr. Isabelle, don't be upset. This Frenchman wants to die very suddenly."

I exclaimed to Dr. Mike:

"Dr. Mike, you are being rude and inconvenient."

Colonel Pierre Raynaud added:

"Don't listen to this drunken loudmouth, doc! I just don't knock his head off out of respect for you and for the president's presence in this space. Don't worry; I will talk it over with him late tomorrow."

On hearing the threat, Dr. Mike held his challenger and punched him, and then, the Frenchman fell backward. At any rate, Pierre Raynaud was younger and stronger than the Englishman was, and thanks to this, he regained his balance and struck back with a big blow that made Dr. Mike tremble. Then, they went to each other, rolling on the floor, exchanging punches and kicks. On

the opposite side, General Gedeon Bagirubwira with his group of Hutus could not stop laughing, as they were delighted to have incited a brawl among gullible foreigners.

"Hahaha."

I was desperate asking someone to separate the two inconsequential men. I had not imagined that the situation reached that point. No one wanted to stop the confusion, and even the president was paying close attention to the intrigue, joyfully. Suddenly, Rose and Elizaphan showed up out of nowhere, joining me to help Dr. Mike, who was taking a real punishment. The three of us together could separate the brawlers once Elizaphan grappled with Colonel Pierre Raynaud, containing him, and Rose and I held the poor Dr. Mike. The two men sat at the table and started a civil dialogue, sharing bottles of beer and doubles of whiskey neat in a companionable way. Then, through the alcohol numbing their male brains, they patched up their differences, settled down and laughed at such ridiculous state of affairs for the sake of a woman.

"Hahaha."

Although my wish was to abandon that place of drunken men, Rose begged me to stay with her until the end of the party. American women do not leave their colleagues behind, especially when the fact relates to the nightlife.

"Gosh! Do not leave me in the midst of these unfamiliar faces, Dr. Isabelle."

"What brought you to an event of the government party, Rose? Are you with suicidal thoughts?"

"No, Dr. Isabelle. I came with Elizaphan. This irresponsible man just invited me out for a date without warning me that we'd pass by here."

"That is the limit! Is he a member of extremist gangs? I will talk to him. If he mistreats Tutsis, he ought not to engage with one of them."

"Please, that's enough for one night, Dr. Isabelle. Elizaphan is not like sheep when it comes to politics, and he does not participate in killing."

"After all, why is he here?"

"As he is a reliable Hutu laborer in the GHF, his boss took him as a bouncer."

"Isn't his boss Tutsi?"

"Yes, he is in flesh and blood."

"And so...?"

"Don't ask me that because I am also in a blissful ignorance of what was going on. In addition, I am not feeling at ease, Doctor. Don't leave me alone, please."

"Take it easy, Rose, as I'll never let you down. Seeing a fervent supporter of the Tutsi cause like Mr. Habimana in this place is unusual."

Dr. Mike explained to us.

"Mr. Habimana is a rich man, despite being Tutsi, Dr. Isabelle."

"What does this have to do with his sympathy for the Hutus?"

"He hates these people. Every one of them, just as most Tutsis do."

"Is he against his will in this meeting, Dr. Mike?"

"Yes and no. It is not an easy answer, but we can say that he is doing politics and treating his self-interests, especially, economic ones."

I looked around and saw the Tutsi farmer chatting privately with President Juvénal Habyarimana on the other side of the hall in a modest table. They were drinking mutzig, the expensive French beer of better quality than the African primus that filled the other spots. The drunken doctor, upon seeing the tasty mutzigs on the president's table, walked out the side door to find one for him.

"Can I get you the chilliest cold one?"

I answered him we did not feel like drinking because I guessed that the drinker would find trouble wherever he went to grab his beer, since he was bombed. Rose added, instead.

"Stop worrying, and take him the way he is, Dr. Isabelle. The Hutus are his companions of partying, and he is not in danger among these people, especially since birds of a feather flock together. Don't forget that Rwanda has an exciting bar culture."

"You are right, Rose. They go together and I am not here to baby a social butterfly."

Dr. Mike stumbled around the place looking for more beers, and some minutes later, he returned with three bottles of mutzig in his hands. I got one and consumed my first dose of alcohol at the party. The French colonel said:

"The farmer Emmanuel Habimana is the greatest contributor to the president's party, Dr. Isabelle."

"You mean they extort him, don't you?"

"If I saw politics from this angle, I would agree with you, but I rather think Mr. Habimana gets personal guarantees and acquires privileges in exchange for his financial support. Money talks."

"He gives bread to those who murder his breed."

"An authoritarian regime in a perpetual state of war requires total collaboration and produces bizarre situations such as the Tutsi money financing acquisition of machetes for the killing. I do not know where this is heading."

Curious about Colonel Pierre Raynaud's explanation, Rose imagined how the Tutsi could preserve his physical integrity and wealth, dealing so close to the Hutus.

"Why don't the Hutus take everything he has at once?"

"Nobody knows how much he has, given that Mr. Habimana is a smart entrepreneur with a large net of ventures, and the bulk of his fortune is abroad."

Rose thought about her family.

"As they cannot steal his money it is reasonable to think that they could take his property instead."

"These men are politicians, but not executives. They do not treat the rich and the poor the same way. If they take the 'Tutsis' business, they will have to work and stop being government parasites. Do not worry, given that they want the GHF running well and in good hands to make adequate money so that they have their share of its wealth."

Dr. Mike amended the Frenchman:

"You will not lose your home, Rose, since the Hutu power will not nationalize enterprises or expropriate goods of citizens. If they do this, the international community will cut funding under way to Rwanda and the corruption will suffer a setback."

In one corner of the hall, Mr. Habimana, with the utmost discretion signed a check and handed it to General Gedeon.

The nervous farmer came to Rose and Elizaphan.

"Good evening, colleagues. I apologize for not giving due attention to you."

"We understand, sir. You are at work, aren't you?" I probed him.

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Isabelle spoke with the intent to let him understand that she knew he was financing the assassins of his people. Nonetheless, as Mr. Habimana believed that he was dealing with his business, he did not understand the situation the same way because his property was the issue at stake in the moment. The GHF he inherited from his father was more important than all the Rwandese Tutsis together. He summoned his two companions to go away, since he was not feeling at ease and that was not his party. Then, they went back to Gitarama town.

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Dr. Mike, Pierre Raynaud and I went into the Red Cross vehicle after them as The Good Hope Farm's Jeep with our friends from Gitarama was going ahead fast. It was the first time I saw a barricade of the radical Hutus. We were in a neighborhood where many of Tutsis lived, and the militiamen blocked down the road, accosting everyone who tried to pass by them, checking their race cards. These operations were part of the militia troop training for further action when the cruelest genocide came in earnest. The militia stopped the automobile of Emmanuel Habimana, and we were a few meters backward because The Hutus flagged us down to wait our turn. Although most Hutus were juvenile males and some had apparently just left childhood, they were all

drinking warm, sorghum beer and smoking weed, what led them to take steps against human rights. When a daring militiaman looked into the car, he cheered up, upon noticing Rose's beauty and opened its door, pulled her by the arm to press her body against the vehicle. As a result, Elizaphan emerged from the van to hit the paratrooper, yet another militiaman struck her boyfriend with a machete, making a scratch on his back. Then, just when Mr. Habimana, the French colonel, and Dr. Mike left the cars to help Rose and Elizaphan, a loud crack of heavy weapon covered all voices. A warning shot of a Russian AK-47 rifle (Automatov Kalashnikov) smashed the Good Hope Farm's car window and stopped the actions. The interahamwes knew where that bang sound came from, to whom that gun belongs, and what it meant. Canisous Rubuga screamed at his militiamen.

"Peace, boys! What the fuck is going on there?"

Everyone stopped, fearing the powerful weapon. He looked at us, at Mr. Habimana, and then, at the paramilitaries to whom he spoke, pointing at the coffee grower.

"This Tutsi has free passage!"

When I heard Canisous Rubuga telling his peers that Mr. Habimana, a Tutsi, had free transit through the roadblock, I understood, in crystalline form, the farmer's contacts with the militaries and Hutu politicians. The Tutsi farmer started the car and left, and on leaving, Rose looked at me and I noted on her face, still fresh, the extent of her fear. Then, I crossed myself, counting on the will of God to keep such a beautiful and young woman away from the hands of freaks like those evildoers. Trying to move the paratroopers out of the way, Colonel Pierre Raynaud approached the Hutus, checking the area around and showing some guidelines on how to proceed when they dealt with high-profile cases. First, he rebuked the militia leader.

"What bullshit is this, Canisous Rubuga? Your people must be out of their damn mind. What about all this drink? I warned you to separate work from play."

It was just what I needed that night: listening to a lesson about the operation method of the Interahamwe. I did not like anything about militias, so I proposed to the doctor:

"Well, let's move away from this horror movie, Dr. Mike. Do you want to take part in a freak show? You don't want to disembowel any Tutsi, do you?"

"This French backing is an outrage and it is hard to see a distinct nation like France supporting this."

"I don't believe the French people are aware of what their soldiers do in this country. Someone has to report this."

"Tell your father, Dr. Isabelle. He is an influential politician and may be the next American President. He can put a stop to this downright disgraceful training."

"I will do it first thing tomorrow morning. Father is a hardheaded person, but a good man. Do you mind if I am late, Dr. Mike?"

"As far as I am concerned, it is okay because I do not care how long you will be on hold on the telephone. If someone dies in the hospital for lack of your care, do not worry, since you will save thousands of others through the senator."

I called my father for the whole week, explaining that the French Army was forming a Hutu paramilitary command, killer of civilians. He returned:

"Isabelle, my Daughter, you told us that you were going to Rwanda only to practice and develop your medical knowledge?"

"I am doing this, Dad."

"Why are you getting involved in the internal policy of that country?"

"I am trying to prevent deaths."

"These casualties have not occurred yet. How can you be sure?"

"People are already dying in my vicinity, and the vast majority of the dead are Tutsi."

"No, Isabelle. I have on hand a report from our embassy in Rwanda, and as I foretold you, there is a larger number of Hutus than Tutsis among the victims."

"I only see Tutsis being buried."

"You have not gone to the north of that country, sweetie. The RPF is winning the war down there. Can't you find normal the government eliminates spies in a time of military strife? I cannot ask President Juvenal Habyarimana to sit back while a foreign rebel force invades his country. What is the good of it? Do your medical work and let the Rwandese find a way to get along with one another, especially because Hutus and Tutsis have been warring for generations. I also heard about a Hutu-led genocide. The radical minority runs this war of nerves to frighten the other ethnicity. I will schedule a meeting between President Juvenal Habyarimana and Comrade Kagame this semester. They will sit at the bargaining table come to terms and seal a peace agreement. Is that okay for you?"

"I am truly grateful, Dad. It looks great."

"Do you want me to send Colonel Pierre Raynaud back to France, Isabelle?"

"Are his troopers going with him?"

"Don't ask me that, darling. France cannot take its troops back from Rwanda. If they go away, the Belgian, the German or the English will replace them. Do not get involved in politics. Your mother and I are proud of your work. The Ambassador mentioned you are popular in Rwanda. On the

contrary, he also reported small talks and use of marijuana, but we understand our girl, for you favor your father. Hahaha."

"Oh, yeah, Dad! I have become the subject of town gossip and I notice that sometimes hostile glances, yet please, do not take Monsieur Raynaud away from Rwanda, seeing that it is better to talk to whom I am already acquainted with."

"Your mother is not in good health, dear. Please, do not play us against each other, and do not annoy her with these issues of racial dissension and deaths because she is worried about your safety in Rwanda. If you intend to complete your internship peacefully, leave her out of this and talk with her only about the Pygmies, your friends, as she loves glad tidings of them. While we are on the subject, which is the name of your boyfriend? Ha! Tharcisse Mugabe. That is a peculiar nickname, isn't it? Hahaha."

"No, Daddy! How dare you. He is only my friend. Give Mommy love."

* * * * *

Dr. Mike and Colonel Pierre Raynaud were talking.

"Get Dr. Isabelle out of this place. I stay with these Hutus."

"In fact, you have a hand in their attitudes."

"Do not make more of this than it is! I just want to straighten up some things around here."

"Please, go ahead because Dr. Isabelle and I are curious to contemplate what you teach them."

"Please, Dr. Mike, take her away from this site because we are in a massacre. Can't you notice the dying Tutsis around us?"

The doctor looked around carefully, yet he only saw the deep dark of the night. In addition, he heard the death sounds of preys dying while its predators fed. Then, he noticed the immense pain in the air, and a great deal of worry occupied his thoughts. He imagined that Isabelle could hit the roof, creating a scene that could be the next New York Times front page if she saw the bloody bodies of the unfortunate Tutsi men, women and children somewhere nearby.

* * * * *

Sensing that something was not right, I rolled down the car window and inquired.

"What is the problem?"

"Nothing is wrong, Dr. Isabelle. I got our liberation, and we are leaving."

"That outlaw group of civilians has no stop-and-search power over us because the Red Cross volunteers have safe-conduct in Rwanda. Do you want me to settle this for you? Everything is too slow."

"We do not need your help or your bravery. Save them for your American friends when you are back to the USA."

The paratroopers became overjoyed on hearing my voice coming from the Land Rover doing an American accent. Two of them, with cleavers in hand, walked toward me as if they were horn dogs sniffing a female, and I stood frozen, seeing the horrible men with colorful and extravagant clothes closing in. Then, I felt wildly beating in my chest the same fear Rose had felt moments before. Fortunately, when they were near the pickup, Pierre Raynaud ordered them to go back.

"Come here, you two!"

Colonel Raynaud stayed with the Hutus, handling things that needed fixing, and Dr. Mike and I overcame the passage through the obstruction.

When we were leaving, I noticed a small, fey creature moving in the dark thicket on the right. The Twa Mukono was wearing a ghostly look beside the mud road. At a glimpse, I realized that he wielded a machete almost his size and I thought he was hunting in inappropriate time and place. Under the moonlight, his eyes lit up and flashed like fire when he looked at me. From my point of view, such a glance did not belong to a human being, as his eyes were bright and stretched like the cat's ones into the darkness. I do not understand why the Twa aimed his witchcraft at me when I passed him. As he was growling and groaning like a convicted ghost dragging a red-hot chain, I cried.

"Stop this vehicle!"

Doctor Mike showed signs of wanting to accelerate the vehicle, but I insisted.

"Please, move this car backward, Doctor!"

"Not at all! It is not a good idea to go back."

"A Twa is among the Hutus into the woods, and they will easily catch him."

"Are you sure of this?"

"I did see him. No wonder people say that Mukono is supernatural."

"It is all dark, and I don't think it would be possible."

"It can only be Mukono because his eyes were red."

"Did you see a red-eyed person, Doctor? It must be a nocturnal animal walking around its hunting ground."

"It does not seem human, but it is Mukono, Dr. Mike. He gives me chills."

Doctor Mike was ironic.

"If a demon possessed that Twa, he doesn't need more help against a bunch of Hutus, does he?"

"You shouldn't mock the nature's forces for which you have no logical explanations."

My boyfriend backed up the car and pulled it up on the side of the road about fifty meters away from the paramilitary blockade. He left me inside it with strict instructions and walked toward them.

"Don't step out of this car even if the sky falls in, Dr. Isabelle. If any ghost comes around roaming on Earth, shout and I will hurry back. Hahaha."

* * * * *

Upon arriving at the group, Dr. Mike saw Mukono sitting on a stone. Interahamwe feelings were fulfilling the Pygmy's mind, overflowing from his eyes. The doctor addressed the Hutu leader.

"What a Twa is doing here, Canisous Rubuga?"

"Is that any of your business?"

"Let's just say yes. Why did you hold him? What goddamn harm can he do against you? Is there any Twa Patriotic Front too?"

Canisous Rubuga laughed.

"Hahaha. TPF! This would be good, Dr. Mike, but the Inkotanyis are enough. It would not be a threat at all, and so, I don't want to kill this little shit."

"So, let him go!"

"He is not stuck! The Twa is decapitating cockroaches on his own accord. This chap is good with a scythe and must have a bunch of deaths under his belt, Dr. Mike. Continue with us and you will see."

"Oh, my God! Do not be wacky, Canisous Rubuga. Are you now recruiting Pygmies for the Interahamwe?"

The Hutu lied.

"I am not in the habit of doing this."

"Either someone puts an end to this madness or you will turn this land into a sea of Tutsi blood."

"You bet I will because the best is yet to come. I am only getting started."

"You are listening to much anti-Tutsi programming of the Radio Rwanda or Thousand Hills. They poisoned you and warped your mind, instilling violence against innocent townspeople."

"Okay, skip the small talk and take the Dr. Isabelle's Twa with you. What does the crazy doctor do with these Pygmies, Dr. Mike? Does she like weird guys licking her? Hahaha."

Dr. Mike changed the subject.

"How could you persuade him to help you in this dirty work?"

"I didn't ask him for anything."

"Do not lie to me, Canisous Rubuga!"

Monsieur Raynaud, who had been listening to the conversation, enlightened the doctor.

"Canisous Rubuga is tricking Mukono, promising him the hunting for own consumption."

Dr. Mike noticed the ruse.

"You must be kidding? This Twa is a hunter and collector of natural resources."

"That is just the point. So, the Interahamwe has one more militiaman in his coven."

The doctor exclaimed:

"Canisous Rubuga has no authority to offer free passage to forest parks."

"You and I get the idea of this, but this small Twa believes that the Hutu is speaking the naked truth and swallowed this pigheadedness. In vain, he has already killed seven men and women this night for the paratroopers' fun. Take him with you, Dr. Mike, while I talk to this murderous rascal."

The Englishman took Mukono to the Land Rover and placed him in the back of the vehicle so that Isabelle did not notice the Pygmy's condition. He started the car and went at full speed.

* * * * *

When we arrived in front of my residence, I proceeded to see Mukono, yet he was not there anymore. So, I asseverated to the doctor.

"Dr. Mike, Mukono is not here. I suppose he has fallen."

"Being as agile as a mountain goat and as sly as a fox, I bet he took matters into his own hands."

"I do not believe he could jump with the vehicle running at such speed. He is flightless."

The Londoner was dead tired and wanted to rest.

"I don't know what he did. You put into words that he turns into a beast, didn't you? Perhaps, now, he is a bird and has flown back to his Hutu friends." His voice was harsh.

"Would he return to the barrier after we saved him? It's senseless."

"I am not knowledgeable about some facts as you seem to be. He must be somewhere in the woods, his true home."

"I see..."

"Even love has its limits, Dr. Isabelle. Do not ask me to go back because I swear I let you go alone this time. Let's just call it a day, please."

"Rest assured, Dr. Mike. We saved Mukono one time tonight, and that is sufficient. If he is stupid to force passage through that obstacle, it is his problem. As you said, the Twa may be resting on a tree branch in one of these thousand hills, keeping an eye out for the Interahamwe to go away."

* * * * *

Isabelle never knew if Mukono returned to the roadblock to cut up more Tutsis or pulled away from the diabolical Canisous Rubuga. Throughout the Rwandan Genocide, Hutus coerced Twas to participate in the killing, and those who did not accept the grisly summoning were murdered. In addition, some Hutus killed innumerable Pygmies on suspicion of favoring Tutsis on the run. Sadly, the Hutus dragged the Twas into the Tutsi-Hutu strife without the poor wretches knowing the reasons for its existence. The Pygmies were the weakest link of the odious genocidal chain. Proportionally, more deaths occurred among Pygmies. In summary, thirty percent of them died in the slaughter, what is a percentage higher than the ten percent of Tutsis whom the Hutus killed during the 1994 Rwandese Genocide.

* * * * *

The image of a mutant Twa with cat-like eyes stuck in my mind for a whole lot of days, and I started to believe the rumors that Mukono was spooky. Even though I am a doctor and had no scientific justification for believing in all of this, his unearthly apparition in the dark about the window of the Land Rover made me reconsider some of my concepts. Africa is a big continent beset with magic and some of it might have taken possession of the intriguing Pygmy. I began to pray in the Father Jumpe's chapel and kept a candle burning next to my bed at the foot of a Virgin Mary statue. Mukono's phosphorescent eyes jumped on me the night we crossed the Hutu blocking, and this meant that his eyes were not supposed to be part of a human organism. Did that gaze intend to tell me anything? Would it be about a genocide that was just at the curb? Did a spirit try to involve me in a spectral thread? Was the brute predicting Mukono's death? Such red eyes would not bring me good tidings.

After we arrived at my house, Dr. Mike slept with me. Compensating for so much annoyance, we spent a lovely and vibrant late night in which he hugged me tight like a willful snake trying to get back at something. He was jealous because I had enjoyed myself dancing to the beat of African music in the French way. However, whenever the English lord got drunk, he satisfied my needs, giving me pleasure like a sexual slave. On a whim, I accepted each touch of his hands on my body, as I wanted to take refuge from the bad

thoughts that made up my mind in those days of terror. In fact, I had run away from the spell of Mukono just to fall into Doctor Mike's alluring small talk. While the libertine joy grew, the Rwandese horror got out of my mind, pushing me to forget that troubled country for a moment. My youth took control of my reasoning, since I was disappointed with such futile efforts to save from death a sad people like that.

As I was feeling Dr. Mike's warm body on mine, my fairy godmother whispered sweet nothings in my ears.

Take it easy and just relax because it is not your fault!

I did not bring the good and the bad to that land, and the madness I saw in those vampire-themed days had nothing to do with me. Before being a medical doctor, I was a girl who wanted to grow old as a woman, running her days with the prospect of a good life. In this world, after winning elections, rulers did nothing to hold back the blood that my medicines could not prevent from gushing out of the misfortune of that people. Thus, I did not feel responsible for so many deaths. I wanted to wear perfume, moisturizing cream, and stuff after taking warm baths with a minimum of comfort. Above all, being an ordinary person was my greatness as a woman who enjoyed the privileges of the anonymity without any cry for great deeds. I had no idea about what happened to the people who also thought so. Yet I had been seeking them for quite some time in my life. Dr. Mike did not understand this feeling of resignation I had inside and believed I was badly prepared for the state of affairs in Rwanda. It would be great that objections did not exist, and everything headed in the same direction like the water does. I would like to raise children side by side with a good husband, in a house with dogs licking my foot every time I woke up at dawn. I was up to grow old together with a discreet man who did not catch the women's attention out there. After all, I wanted to be the star of my space and the ruler of my bedroom. Why are there so many heroes in the world? I was tired of them all, and if the human suffering did not exist, we would not need any touch of their hands. I liked walking down the streets of New York in summer days as an anonymous girl wearing lipstick and tight skirt, being sure how everything goes easier when one has nothing to worry about on strolling through downtown Manhattan.

I slept late and hard with a refreshing selfishness and egocentric alienation. When I woke up late in the morning, I saw that Dr. Mike was no longer with me on the blasphemous bed beside the Virgin Mary at whose feet there was a used candle. I remembered that I had promised the doctor to call my father, asking him to extinguish the Interahamwe. Therefore, I showered, dressed up and left to find a pay phone that worked at least once, dreaming of saving the Rwandese from a violent disorder with a simple phone call. The

machete of Canisous Rubuga and the spirit of Mukono were just a sign of the catastrophe that would come to Rwanda. Abaddon would disembark from a plane on fire on the night of April 6, 1994, near the Kanombe Kigali Airport.

V - THE SPIRIT

Once, I was having a bad day when things do not go right. As I was overworking in the Kigali Hospital Center, I took a few minutes off because I was tired and the heat of Kigali made me sluggish. I went to Tharcisse Mugabe's stall to rest a little and talk to my dearest friend. To my surprise, a pleasant afternoon was outside, and the breeze fluttered my hair. On arriving, a smell of flowers came over me.

"Tharcisse, please, go buy a sandwich and soda for us and bring the morning paper because Dr. Mike wants to read the news."

"It is right away, Dr. Isabelle! Could you hold my flowers for me, please? I will be right back."

As always, the helpful Twa promptly took off in a hurry in search of our snacks. Then, I could observe the blooms around, getting them in my hands to feel their textures. I brought them to my nose and inhaled their scent, having in mind the teachings of Father Jumpe, and I noticed that the Twa had learned the lessons well, progressing wonderfully. The flowers gave off a sweet fragrance.

When he returned, I questioned if he had problems to learn how to read.

"It was difficult to complete my studies, Dr. Isabelle."

"Why, Tharcisse Mugabe?"

"The other lads didn't want me with them, and it was not easy to fit in."

"Did you suffer discrimination?"

"I got bullied, and I felt small. I was an outcast because the headmistress did not allow me to sit close to the other pupils. People used to pick on me even when I stayed alone at my place. My teacher, for instance, punished me almost every day."

What a Twa has to do in a school? Why did I want to recite the alphabet?

Then, one day, she sent me out to beg for money.

You ought to behave as the other Twas do and start begging on the square to help your family to secure its livelihoods!

She threatened not to allow me to advance in school and took me to the fair. She made me sit on the sidewalk to ask for alms.

Please, give a penny to a poor thing!

I have cut class for months. After school, I returned, went in and gave the money to my teacher.

Give me this money because I will put it to good use!

Then, she handed me back a dime or two and bagged almost all the coins. I remember that she always said that unemployment was on the increase.

You are progressing, Tharcisse Mugabe. A Twa does not need reading to make ends meet, since the Tutsis and Hutus will never give you a job that requires any technical knowledge, especially because the Rwanda's economy is in decline!

"Tharcisse, that is horrible! If I met your teacher, I would strangle her."

"I was just a kid, and I thought it was everything in order. I never came across her yet again, Dr. Isabelle, as she stayed in Byumba."

"How could you stop begging?"

"Father suspected when he noticed I was arriving home with pennies."

"What did he do about it?"

"He slapped me for real."

"This did not remove your grief, Twa."

"Oh, yes, yet he also reported the story to his boss, a great Hutu. The employer of my father, for his part, complained to the headmistress and also to the head of the hill, causing my teacher's firing."

"Your father's boss ought to be an important man."

"He is powerful until today, since he owns the hill of Byumba, and is almost as rich as Mr. Habimana of Gitarama. He commands even the head of the hill."

"What does the head of a hill mean?"

"Oh! I am sorry, Dr. Isabelle. Head of the hill is how the Batwa call the chief of the town hall. The head of the hill of Byumba is the head of the prefecture of Byumba. We do not understand the division of Rwanda by districts, prefectures, towns, and cities made by Hutus and Tutsis. We see no

Rwanda, but mountains standing shoulder to shoulder as far as the eye can see."

"Hahaha. It is meaningful, Tharcisse Mugabe, as everything seems overly hilly to me in this country."

"We only realize the existence of a country named Rwanda when we go abroad, and someone identifies us as born in these hills."

* * * * *

Once a Pygmy who was roaming around downtown, living on aid from others engaged in an uneven brawl with a Tutsi, and he came crawling to the hospital by himself, looking for help. As it ever happened whenever the hospital admitted an indigent Twa, the doctors dumped the Pygmy on the pavement. They turned their backs, ignored and forwarded him to me.

Send this Twa to the American resident physician!

Various colleagues disapproved my option for the Pygmies, as they would never endorse a Twa occupying a clean hospital bed. By these actions, they created the procedure of caring for the Twa inpatients on the floor of the hospital when I was out.

The severe loss of blood showed me that they lacked immediate help for the decrepit man, leaving him at the point of death. The Twa probed me.

"Doctor, am I going to die?"

"Where there is life, there is hope. Do not push yourself, please".

I warned him to relax, yet he kept on talking. He needed blood and oxygen. However, nothing I did would make the hospital director complacently release resources for a Pygmy, taking into account that we did not have adequate stuff even for the Tutsis and Hutus. Therefore, I needed Dr. Mike's help to relieve the agony of the little human being.

"Rose, please. Find Dr. Mike urgently and let him know what is going on."

"Please, speak clearly, Dr. Isabelle. What do I have to tell the doctor?"

"Hurry up, dear, because we do not have much time to save this man. Just tell him where we are and answer his questions. Many things are missing."

I knew the Englishman was an experienced physician and when she described to him my affliction, he would comprehend what my needs were. As Rose was an excellent nurse and loved to understand everything that involved her profession, she criticized me when she was on the way out.

"Damn it! I must switch my duty and join another doctor because you ran out of methods."

"Don't talk back and get on with it, Tutsi bimbo. Maybe you intend to be Dr. Paul Nicayenzi's assistant."

"Please, don't be insulting, Dr. Isabelle. We are friends, don't we? He's hitting on me, yet I don't flirt back, for I love Elizaphan."

Rose brought Dr. Mike. On arriving, he looked at the small person in the bed, and diagnosed the death with expressive eyes towards me. Even though it was a vain task, he headed to see the administrative director, asking for access to the stockroom and blood bank, as he knew I would curse him if he did not do it.

The Pigmy started to get it off his chest.

"Do you try any offering for your god?"

"Catholics do not have this custom, and we communicate with Him through prayers."

"You have music, don't you?"

"Yes, we have religious songs, but they are not a direct communion with God because prayers are our primary means of speaking to our Lord."

"I would like you to sing me a Matwa song before dying, miss."

I hummed a snippet of an African native melody that sounded like a funeral hymn, yet I had to stop, since I did not know it fully."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I cannot sing any song of your people, yet I promise to learn something."

"We sing for our dead and ancestors. Am I going to find my ancestors or your saints once I die?"

"Are you Christian?"

"I am not sure because I seldom go to a church. I called on Father Jumpe in his chapel once, and he talked about the saints."

"I am sure you are a decent Christian, as all valuable men in the world are for practicing the precepts of Christ. We are all children of the same god."

"It is time to meet my god, madam, and I feel sorry, as my life was no good to myself or anyone else. Anyway, tell people I am grateful to everyone. Sadly, I can't pay you because I have nothing left."

"You do not have to pay me. No need to thank me, as I am a doctor."

"Good of you, dear dame. Life would be gentler with more first-class people like you."

"If you meet any jungle apparition, ask him to take better care of the Twas while they are still alive."

While the Pygmy was saying his thoughts, Rose and Dr. Mike expectantly paused, listening to us contemplatively, respecting my patient's sorrow.

"I hope that the spirits love me, as I was an agile hunter, a responsive father, and a dependable husband. I just did not beg well."

I stared at Rose and Dr. Mike with my head aching. I stood still with a frosty absence of feeling in my heart, as I had nothing to say to them, and they were quiet too for fear of speaking to me under such sincere mourning. Without a word or cry, I went to pieces and left the place with the strength of a hollowed-feeling exploding in disharmonious, short bursts inside me. Dr. Mike began to fill the obituary of my patient who was very dead.

* * * * *

The Englishman pleaded with the nurse.

"Go and get her, Rose, because things like that take the life out of her soul. Rwanda is messing up the mind of that American girl. She was raised in the lap of luxury, having all she needed, but is psychologically unstable."

"Do not worry, Dr. Mike, because she is fine. I think I understand Dr. Isabelle better than anyone else in this city does. We have to go easy on her in these moments of reflection. And besides, nobody can hide her from me in Kigali, not one person in this world."

"That's right, Rose. You are a good nurse and Dr. Isabelle's closest friend, and she has only the two of us in this country."

"She also counts on Tharcisse Mugabe, Dr. Mike."

"The Twa is a world of trouble for her and only brings more concerns."

"You have not reached the heart of that girl yet."

"I try, Rose."

"It is a little bit unfulfilling! Her heart dies when she sees you flirting with the nurses, and you should be more discreet because it's wrong on so many levels. If something offensive happens to Dr. Isabelle because of your acts of infidelity, I will never forgive you, Dr. Mike. I would like to witness her getting involved with Tharcisse Mugabe or with whoever is naturally supportive and kind to her."

"You are wordy and tend to overreact a little."

"I do not think so. Tharcisse Mugabe is the soul of kindness, and they never tire of being kind to each other. The Twa gives his all to her and is always there crying near her when things get tough for both. He is at her service in living or dying. Last week, I had a transparent dream in which he laid down his life for her, and I guess he can do this for the love of her."

Dr. Mike did not like the conduct of the conversation, thinking over the chance she intrigued him with his girlfriend, and therefore, he signed the Pygmy's obituary just to leave the operating room immediately. Even so, he knew that the paperwork was of no use for the reason that the dead Twa did not possess a registered name from a notary office. He handed the document to the Tutsi and went away.

"Please, get these forms and provide an adequate funeral for this nobody. Get some flowers with Tharcisse Mugabe to put on his grave."

This meant that Rose was alone facing the two sides of the problem. Thus, she called a colleague, an illiterate Hutu cleaner, who did all sorts of bizarre, cleaning jobs for the CHK such as mopping clogged latrines and infected cesspools. She gave him the corpse of the Twa.

"Take him away!"

"*Who* am I supposed to give this body of Twa, Miss Kabaguyoi?"

"I do not know, as he was not entitled to funeral service."

"I'll dump it in the Nyabarongo, then."

"No! Cross-Jesus! Do not do this because if you throw this Pygmy in the river, and Dr. Isabelle hears about this, she kills us or we lose our jobs."

"What do I do with it, instead? Would you prefer that I burn it?"

"Oh my! Oh my! Are you insane? Give him a proper burial."

"I'll bury it in the backyard with the medical waste, Miss Kabaguyoi."

Rose started tearing her hair out, walking round the room. Then, she calmed down, picked up the Hutu by the sleeve of his robe and finally put her foot down.

"That's enough! Do not tell me what you will do with him. The doctor left me alone with this hard task and I wonder if she knows that dead Twa brings hard time. Please, leave me out of this, given that I already have quite enough sins to justify to God. In any event, do not bury him in a shallow grave so that the animals do not dig up and eat him in front of people because I would not like to see the vultures circling above my head. Obviously, if Dr. Isabelle asks anything, fool her, saying that the undertaker came for the body to bury it as a John Doe in the burial ground. Use this opportunity to keep these forms with him too."

It was unusual to give documents to him, and that being the case, he had no idea about what to do with the obituary.

"What is this, Miss Kabaguyoi? What do I do with these papers?"

"Bury them together with him because they represent what he was in life. Thus, let him carry them to wherever he is going so that he does not forget that he has no name yet."

The servant wrapped the Twa's corpse with an oily rag and mixed it with the hospital waste in a garbage cart, camouflaging its identity while he

was walking across the edifice. With clean conscience, he collected the trash in cans along the corridors as he used to do.

* * * * *

After attending the patient, the silhouette of Tharcisse Mugabe came to my mind, and I walked to his point of sale in the shade of the exuberant podocarp. Needing to unwind a bit, I was not in the mood to work anymore, and besides, his stories would make me well, easing the effects of the death of the Pygmy under my care. It had shaken me badly and kept going through my head. The afternoon brought the start of the evening, and as the weather began to cool, I was feeling the effects of a mild cold spell. When I walked through the courtyard of the Hospital Center, I came across a group of Twas. They were sitting on the grass, chatting, smoking tobacco and drinking some homemade beverage. A Pygmy woman called my name.

"Dr. Isabelle!" Domitilla addressed me.

"What's up, Domitilla?"

"We heard that an injured Matwa was hospitalized here. Is it someone from our community?"

"I think he is Ruhengerian, and he was unusually unlucky, seeing as he slipped out of a hostile region just to die in Kigali."

"What is his name?"

"He was not carrying any documents, but you can look for a nurse named Rose Kabaguyoi and ask her to show his body. Who knows if any of you happen to know him and notify a relative?"

Mukono was in the group and decided to make fun of me, driving me to speak in Rukiga, as he was sure I did not understand anything about that tongue.

"Ori ota, nyabo?" (How are you, madam?).

I could not miss out on showing him that my conversations with Tharcisse Mugabe were having some effects, and I replied in Rukiga, surprising him.

"Ni gye. Shana iwe?" (I am well, and you?).

The Twas laughed and applauded me. In contrast, Mukono kept quiet, noticing I was not feeling well.

"Oaire ota?" (How did you spend the night?).

"Ndaire gye." (I spent the night well).

"Oine kyayi?" (Do you want tea?).

"So Noogamba ki?" (What did you say?).

Domitilla spelled it slowly.

"Kyayi!" (Tea!). She extended me a cup and explained "Kyayi gye!" (Good tea!).

I got it. I already had heard that word.

"Kyayi ki?" (What tea?).

Mukono added:

"Otafayo. Oraire gye, nyabo." (Don't mind. Have a good night, madam).

I did not get the last words. As I like chai, green tea, ginger tea and black tea, I drank it gratefully because they provided me an instructive dialogue.

"Yebare!" (Thank you).

I probed Domitilla.

"What is this brew made of?"

Mukono was urinating behind a tree, and only he knew it.

"I am not aware of this. He made it with forest herbs, and I think this tea has a mix of ingredients, Dr. Isabelle." "Ogume Kurungi!" (Stay well!)

I was afraid to have sipped an unknown infusion because it started to burn my digestive tract. Mukono had returned.

"What is this infusion for, Mukono?"

He answered:

"It is a tonic drink, Dr. Isabelle. Do not be afraid because it is not venomous, and it will strengthen you instead."

"Energetic?" I inquired.

"That may be the case because some troopers use it when they go on fighting."

I said:

"Ogume gye" (goodbye).

I was feeling weak and tired. Maybe, I had the flu, and on that account, an energy drink would go down well. At first, I saw that Mukono was a bit odd, but even so, I credited his agitation to the fact that he was smoking hemp. Months before, Dr. Mike had urged me to be careful when ingesting any substance that the Twas offered me. He had acquired a thorough knowledge of the subject since he worked with a group of Belgian scientists, who performed scientific research in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest where tribes of Pygmies inhabit. He found good and bad stuff in the herbs that those people used in religious rituals and pagan celebrations. Furthermore, according to Dr. Mike, the Twas, through the evolutionary process and natural selection, had built up tolerance to some substances that Europeans and other foreigners do not have.

Shortly after I drank the tea, my heart speed up, and my mouth dried up. I felt feverish, dizzy and nauseated. Something was not right, indubitably, and as I felt light-headed, I would suffer a psychic disturbance until I took a nap. I thought of going back to ask Dr. Mike's opinion.

Unfortunately, I had exhausted my entire quota of his patience that day. Thus, I laid a hand on my neck, checking my body temperature on my own. In turn, Domitilla was suspicious of the tea's contents and surveyed me with big eyes.

"Are you feeling well, Dr. Isabelle?" She turned briefly to her husband. "What did you give her to drink, Mukono?"

"It is just our special beverage."

Domitilla looked at me and added:

"This tea takes some minutes to kick in, Doc. The odds are you are going to feel light-headed because this is the first time you have it. Mukono should not have offered it to you. I think you should sit back and enjoy a feeling of well-being now, and when you have this drink more often, you will get used to its effects."

"It is all right, Domitilla! I am somewhat disturbed in my nerves, but it is not only because of this infusion. I had an eventful shift that exhausted me, and I just need something that makes me sleep a bit. Speaking of that, which herb did you put in this tea?"

"It does not contain only a single species of them, but the strongest is a mushroom."

"Mushroom? My goodness! I guessed it was made of harmless leaves."

I said goodbye and walked toward the flowers and the podocarp. When I got close to Tharcisse Mugabe, I did not pay attention to him and started along the first path ahead. The Twa noticed my eccentric behavior.

"Where are you off to, Dr. Isabelle?"

"This doesn't concern you, Twa. I am going to meet a friend."

Tharcisse Mugabe looked at me and thought that something was not right. He grabbed me by the arm and brought me back to his tent, and I did not have any reaction. The Twa looked around trying to find someone we knew. He suggested:

"Come on, Dr. Isabelle! Let us go back to the hospital, since we need to find Dr. Mike or Miss Kabaguyoi. I see that you need them. What's wrong?"

"I am not sure, Tharcisse, but I guess a sip of a Mukono's tea disagreed with me."

"Jesus Christ! Didn't I tell you that Mukono and Domitilla are sorcerers? You should not have anything they offer to drink or eat without the knowledge of it."

"Do you think they poisoned my tea?"

"Evidently, they don't, Dr. Isabelle."

"Thank, God, because I am coming down with something. Please, bring Dr. Mike to me, since my head is buzzed."

"Did you drink the mushroom tea?"

"Yes, I did."

"I am sorry, but you will see things. By the way, who is your friend?"

"Which friend?"

"You mentioned that someone just called your name."

"Yes, yep... I have to hurry because she needs me."

"Where will she take you to, Dr. Isabelle?"

"I am going to a special place, Tharcisse. It is a bamboo fence."

"Oh, my God! Which bamboo fence? Hold on a minute, please. I'm coming after Dr. Mike and Miss Kabaguyoi straightaway."

* * * * *

Outlandish fantasies started to wander through Isabelle's brain. Although Tharcisse tried to lift her, a little Twa could not maintain her standing, and therefore, he despaired and rushed to the hospital to ask for help. As the American doctor had a reputation to uphold at work, her loyal friend did not want to expose her to embarrassments. He did not want to enter the hospital with her in that healthy state without knowing whether she had consumed any dope. Instead, he intended to pass the concern to Dr. Mike discreetly, saying that she was tipsy so as not to create problems to his friends Mukono and Domitilla. Even though he asked the door attendant at the hospital to keep an eye on her across the street, the doorkeeper was busy and easily forgot about Isabelle.

* * * * *

Something was emanating from the dark surroundings, lurking around like a leopard dodging the moonlight to catch a gazelle in the woods. Something was trying to communicate, and some stimuli were preparing me for a meeting. All my spirit pushed me to a touch of a being that was closing in, bringing an imminent contact. Then, the passing of time slowed down, and the podocarp's leaves took longer to reach the soil when they fell. Every second was worth a minute, each glance a whole landscape and each memory an entire history. Something unusual was about to loom while a superior force gripped my vital functions. Then, a beautiful woman who was into a blue light approached and gestured, inviting me to accompany her. Finally, I felt something lifting me from the stool, taking me by my hand, and I raised my head to see a beautiful African woman. She asked me:

"Isabelle, why are you taking so long? I am waiting for you!"

"I apologize. Tharcisse Mugabe held me."

"Was it the Twa?"

"Yes."

"Leave him where he is."

"What do you want? Who are you?"

"Come with me and you will know."

The beautiful African lady took me for a ride. I smiled and commented:

"I could not stand up by myself."

She added gently:

"Come closer, Isabelle. Let me walk you and unleash your fantasy!"

We were walking and singing medieval chants along the dark streets until we get into a vacant lot. It was a wooded bamboo grove.

* * * * *

Tharcisse Mugabe returned with Dr. Mike and Rose. He was scared when he noticed that his beloved girl was not sitting in the place where he had left her.

"My goodness! Someone took Dr. Isabelle!"

"How do you know that she was taken? Couldn't she have gone alone?"

"I suppose not, Dr. Mike. She did not have conditions to walk by herself, and even the direction of the CHK in front of us she did not notice."

Rose suggested:

"I am going to call Lieutenant Fred Kaka, Dr. Mike, now that we need all hands on deck to deal with this situation."

"Quiet down, Rose! First, we walk around the block because have to be discreet on this issue. Let us split up and check the neighborhood. We'll meet back here in fifteen minutes."

They searched the surroundings of the CHK without success. When they came together in front of the stall of flowers, Rose no longer accepted replies and called Lieutenant Fred Kaka. After the militaries arrived, the group undertook a massive search through the city during the night, corner by corner, every inch of it. Besides the military vehicle, they also used the Land Rover of the Red Cross. They took as the basis for the search, Tharcisse Mugabe's information that the doctor should have gone to a bamboo fence. Dr. Mike inquired about it, incredulously.

"What bamboo fence, Twa? Are you kidding us? Did you hear Dr. Isabelle say this?"

"Yes, I did, Dr. Mike."

"Why didn't you have the wit to ask where this goddamn fence is?"

"She did not know a thing about it."

"How come she does not know?"

"She just affirmed me that someone had called her to go to a bamboo fence."

"Who did this, boy?"

"Nobody knows for real, Dr. Mike. Although she was speaking to a supposed woman on our side, nothing but the wind was whistling around like music to our ears. So, I grew sort of frightened and ran right towards you asking for help."

Rose hinted:

"She might have talked to some ancestor or dead friend. I bet Dr. Isabelle is having a revelation, since she has eerie feelings from time to time when she speaks sleeping or awake into the unseen. She manages it so convincingly that scares me. I believe that Dr. Isabelle is a medium and has a sort of sixth sense."

"It is all I need! Is that fake American psychic becoming the bearer of messages from Heaven now? Shame on you, Tharcisse Mugabe, you worthless Twa! How could you leave her alone? You should have had the guts to fight a silly ghost from beyond the grave. I think this thing has a great deal to do with Mukono's tea. I want to discover what the drink of the second-class quack is for real. Let's accompany Lieutenant Fred Kaka and look for Dr. Isabelle."

As many abandoned bamboo paddocks existed in Kigali, they find it difficult to get to the right place, and it only came about with the arrival of the first faint rays of the rising sun bringing the blossoming of a new morning.

* * * * *

Along the way, I spoke with the phantom.

"What do you feel, Isabelle?"

"I am tired."

"Then give up walking and levitate. You can coast through the air like a bird!"

I floated over the ground, accompanying her, riding along the wavy surface of the streets. A pleasurable feeling of relief took over my body. All of a sudden, the landscape was alternating successive hues of colors rhythmically. In spite of the dark night, everything was clear and bright before my eyes. Moreover, I felt the detachment of my body by the absence of touch when the blessing of angels enlightened my soul. I was soaring for the first chance in my life.

"Can we fly higher?" I questioned her.

"Yes, you are ready to reach the high altitude if you want. Let's fly away up to the clouds!"

As if by magic, we were on the top of the highest hills, journeying across an immense overcast Kigali's roof, breaking through bunches of white clouds. I was just high, seeing a dark land using its twinkling dots of light to mirror the sky over my head that was resplendent with stars. I did see the ceiling of the CHK and Tharcisse Mugabe's pushcart. I held out my hand, and an African violet came to me from the ground.

The African Madonna took me to a wasteland where a bamboo fence encircled bushes and debris. With a hand gesture, she asked me to draw near her. When I arrived at her side, she pointed at somewhere next to a stone and showed me the remains of a baby. The crushed skeleton was incomplete. It did not have any muscles or other tissues. Insects and worms devoured it. Then, I understood what was going on, and which I had to do, bearing in mind that she needed me to handle the bones of the violated infant. Maybe, he was a son whom she could not create with ease. In doing so, I took off my robe and picked up one by one, depositing them on my attire because the incorporeal being could not hold material objects. Subsequently, I left them in the same corner of the rock and she explained to me:

"Now, you know I am a mother, Isabelle. I am the spirit that stands for all mothers in the earthly world. Many of us will suffer in Rwanda this year, my daughter. Do something for us!"

"What am I supposed to do?"

"You will know at the right moment, sweetheart. You take after your father, so I need you to be strong. Anyway, I will help you as I can. You have been chosen and will be put to the test of terror!"

Then, the beautiful black woman has turned into a graceful white woman, and some bright jewels shone on her neck. A diamond ring, an emerald bracelet and all sorts of woman's wonders got brighter on her. My mother was in front of me to my astonishment. I cried the moment a chill of fear went through my heart, as it was her voice. She always said the same phrase to me. *"You are always stubborn like your father!"* I probed:

"Why was I chosen, Mom?"

"Apollyon wants to lure you away from God, Isabelle! He will put you on probation. So, be strong and do not lose your faith in Christ. Do not let him hold you and get possession of your soul!"

"When will it happen?"

"The angel of the bottomless pit will come to this country and he will rise out of the deepest chasm on Earth. Look out for the Nyabarongo River. Coming from an underworld, he will cross the dimensions through that doorway, bringing an immense fireball to demarcate the beginning of his shadowy Rwandan Government. I am sorry, but I cannot be with you at home anymore, honey. I am serving Our Lord now and you are alone handing a sword made of love!"

"What about dad, Mommy?"

"He has just left me, Isabelle!"

"Is he dead?"

"Please, dear, do not cry, save your tears for the days of woes to come."

In an Africa of numerous enchantments, a sensitive person like me was in the middle of a dreamlike magic of an exotic continent. They came to me with their interests, using me as an intermediary to transmit to the world a creepy notice, and I had to be careful. I turned to the ectoplasm and saw her smiling when she faded into the air. She was now a prime and beautiful phantasm of smoke, waving in my direction. The fiery phantom, an archetype of the human motherhood, went into the dark night.

Lastly, I had a sweet and refreshing sleep. My mother took me for a ride among phosphorescent angels in a heavenly way that was filled with blue lights in an awesome dream that happened away from Rwanda and as close to God as I have ever dared to be.

Thus, as the hours went by, I heard repeated claims.

"Dr. Isabelle! Dr. Isabelle, are you okay?"

It was Rose's voice. I was drowsy, yet her insistent tugs took me back to reality, and I came back from a long way away. Dr. Mike, Tharcisse Mugabe, and Lieutenant Fred Kaka were beside the Tutsi nurse. Seeing my condition, Rose made me sit up and started crying. I looked at her and noticed that she was trying to tell me something. She spoke to the men meaning that it was a women's affair.

"Keep back, please! Let me talk to her."

Dr. Mike looked at Rose and suggested:

"We must take her to the hospital."

She returned:

"Sorry, but the last thing she needs in this instant is medicine. Let us talk first."

"It is all right, Miss Kabaguyoi. You have five minutes with her. So, do your best."

The morning light was appearing over the hills of Kigali. My clothes were torn and I had marks of violence on my body. As my legs had been bare for everyone to contemplate, the terror came over me and I stared at my friend, looking for an explanation. She stretched out her hand, touched my shoulders and motioned for me to stand up. She hugged me and said in a low voice:

"We have no idea about what happened to you tonight, Dr. Isabelle. I am sorry."

I had lost track of the time.

"How did I get here? What time is it?"

"Nobody knows about you. It has been some time since dawn and we searched for you the whole night through, and, just moments ago, someone called the gendarmerie, saying that he had seen a white woman lying dead in these bushes. Do you remember who brought you here?"

"Now I guess, Rose. My mother took me here."

"Please, do not talk to me like that, Dr. Isabelle, because I do care about you."

"Why are you crying?"

"Can't you see? It seems you got raped."

"Am I violated? Are you loony?"

"Don't you see your condition? The soldiers are frightened, and I heard them saying that you are the color of the wind."

"God! Which color is this?"

"I cannot wonder how it is, but it may not be good. You are pale with a few bruises on your body. Are you in much pain? Did anyone ill-treat you?"

"No, nobody hurt me and it's totally cool now."

In fact, I was uneasy, and I wished I had a mirror to see the tone of my skin, since I was probably with a food allergy.

"Rose, you are a woman and know that if someone had mistreated me when I was high, I would feel now. Don't you agree?"

"Yes, I do. You just need to rest."

"I wonder if Mukono did any harm to me."

"He could not have done it. He had enough of the gendarmerie last night and would confess his sins under such torture. Some witnesses declared they spent the night with him until the police get there. Someone might have taken advantage of you when you were unconscious. Kigali is crawling with unscrupulous people."

"If it was not a work of Mukono, who else could do it? I have a score to settle with that Twa someday."

"Be calm, Dr. Isabelle. Do not hold a grudge in your heart because he seems to be innocent. His only mistake was giving you a sip of tainted tea."

"What was wrong with it, Rose?"

"So far, we do not have an answer. Dr. Mike will show Father Jumpe a sample of the mushroom. The Angolan can clarify something about the damn infusion. Will you do the exams?"

"Which ones?"

"I heard Dr. Mike telling the lieutenant that he will have you checked out with a forensic medical examination. They are suspicious of sexual violence because of your delicate condition when we spotted you lying on this rock."

"Oh! Are they nuts? No way! I am looking that bad because I tried to remove these vomit stains from my clothes. If a power can make me feel vulnerable that way, I wonder it is from an unclean spirit."

"It may be a malicious work of a gifted sorcerer like Mukono, Dr. Isabelle?"

"Rose, in my deepest self, I cannot believe that a Twa wizard possesses such magical force. God is my surety. I met my mother, and she would not let anyone hurt me. While on the subject, she showed me some bones of a kid behind that rock. I promised her to make an appropriate burial for her adopted child."

Rose moved to the appointed local and found the remains of a baby on a piece of my white coat. After that, Dr. Mike called her and they talked for a moment as Priest Jumpe was closing in to comfort me.

"Rose, Father Jumpe has just arrived."

"I passed him back there, Dr. Mike, and he is with the doctor. What did he tell you?"

"He brings a message from Washington to Dr. Isabelle."

"What is it about?"

"We must take her home because we have to break the bad news."

"Oh! Just tell me now, please."

"Her mother died this night."

"Gosh! Dr. Isabelle said her mother was with her here."

"If she confided that, nothing will make her easily set her mind and rest in a hospital bed. Let's express condolences in the best possible way and take this poor woman home."

I spent a week in New York participating in the wake and funeral of my mother, with her in my deepest thoughts and prayers. Father was sad about the loss of his long-time companion, and he did not care when I informed him I would return to Rwanda to continue my training job at the Red Cross. He did not lay his hand gently upon my shoulders and patted me on the cheek, giving me any advice as always. He just talked to me almost meaninglessly with no feelings or emotion.

"Go, daughter, and run your life. You are already a grown woman, and I am old. The time has come for you to follow your own path. Under any circumstances, I am here if you need me."

Seeing my father in a sad phase of mourning and suffering that way broke my heart. I did not leave his side throughout the week. Despite that, I had to return to Rwanda, since I had promised it to my mother, although the influence of the psilocybin was still stuck in my insides.

* * * * *

Psilocybin is the main psychoactive alkaloid of some mushrooms. Its hallucinogenic effect varies from one individual to another and resembles those of the LSD. It causes from excitement and euphoria with small doses to distortions of shapes, colors, and hallucinations under high amount. The ingestion occurs by dehydrated and ground mushroom infusion. The first impression is usually a mild dizziness that is followed by a possible stomach discomfort and vomiting. Changes in visual perception and spatial awareness come about. At the climax, a narrowing field of consciousness makes the user of this substance embark on intermittent daydreams that push him to a relationship between the real and the imaginary occupied with unusual and supernatural understandings. The consumer can smell a fragrance that invokes a color or hear a sound that loads an image, and also, feel or touch the nothingness. If Isabelle had ingested more than one cup of tea, she might be until now in a cold mist riding winged horses among blessed angels or strolling hand in hand with her mother in a fanciful Eden in the sight of God.

Dr. Mike questioned Father Jumpe:

"Are you sure that this mushroom contains psilocybin, Father Jumpe?"

"Can you believe it, Dr. Mike? This simple vegetable left Dr. Isabelle in such state."

"How could the Twa Mukono put his hand on it?"

"I will check if the little sorcerer collects it in the forests as he confessed to the crime. In short, I will corner and interrogate him."

Even Dr. Mike felt compassion, although he was a heartless man.

"Please, do not beat the unlucky bastard anymore, Father. He caught too much of the gendarmes."

"For the Blessed Virgin! I would not hurt the Twa. Do not forget I am a servant of Christ."

"Sometimes, I think that you do not look anything like a priest. Hahaha."

"Do not laugh, Dr. Mike! Remember that your girlfriend has just lost her mother."

"I'm sorry, Father. But tell me how else Mukono could have obtained these mushrooms."

"As it turns out, he found it with me."

"What do you mean?"

"I have samples of this plant in my plant collection."

"I think he comes to help you."

"Mukono is sagacious and lives in the jungle. Maybe, he felt any scent that is indifferent to us, but meaningful to a savvy Twa."

"He sniffed the psilocybin in the mushroom..."

"It is weird, but I could swear on the bible. That Pygmy majored in sorcery and got a Ph.D. in trickery."

"Well, that was a close one, but by this, we have been. From now on, hide your fungus."

"Disastrously, some Twas asserted that Mukono makes this beverage for more than two years."

"Oh, no! He has been stealing from you for a long time, Father Jumpe."

"I would not be that blockhead! Think about it a bit, please."

Dr. Mike reasoned for a few seconds and exclaimed:

"My goodness me! Mukono is cultivating this mushroom in the woodlands."

"Yeah, well, that's the rub! That ghastly leprechaun introduced an exotic species in this ecosystem."

"Knowing that these suffered people can go into another numbing drug is bad news."

"I need your help to pressure that Twa to reveal his secrets. Let us extinguish his seedbeds."

The doctor and the Priest Jumpe forced Mukono to indicate the locations of the mushroom planting, and they spent six days wiping up copies of the plant. In any case, they were tired soon after, facing a Herculean challenge, and the Parish Priest reached a sad conclusion.

"It's not worth the trouble anymore, Dr. Mike. Look at these sprouts on the way. Nature has already selected the mushroom intruder as a native individual."

"Shouldn't these plants be around for a while?"

"Who knows, dear friend? Even if Mukono tells me that these plants are Rwandese since the Cretaceous, I could not trust that wily Twa. Only a forest audit could clarify this. Preventing their evolution in Rwandan soil would be a magnificent project. In short, it is a task for God, not for us. Nature will keep its evolutionary cycle, and now with the malignant interference of a human being."

"You mean Mukono's intervention."

"Even so, it's about a human doing, Dr. Mike."

"Sometimes, I understand the beliefs of Dr. Isabelle that the Twa is a reincarnated animal or a devil's spawn. So he is."

Father Jumpe crossed himself and remarked:

"For God's love! Do not quote the name of the demon in front of me."

"So, Father Jumpe, you must exorcise the Twa. Hahaha."

Dr. Mike was a heretic scientist, therefore, he would never believe in supernatural powers of Mukono, and he was mightily relieved to have the

information that Isabelle had done psilocybin. He would never accept that ghosts and lost souls appeared to her through a mystical touch, and in every circle of gossip in which he was, he argued that the US girl did not talk to any fallen angels. Instead, she was high on drugs. The reputation of the American doctor was deteriorating, as she kept adding fuel to the flames each passing day, and, repeatedly, her name was associated with drugs.

The rumors that the foreigner was crazy grew in Rwanda and the backbiting too. Some postulated that five evildoers had raped her in a bamboo grove, and others maintained that the gendarmes found her in an orgy with the Twas, drinking alcohol and smoking weed. The rumor that an angel had revealed that a full-fledged demon would come to Kigali was the more recurring in Rwanda.

In the following few days, the police sealed off the area around Isabelle's residence. She had requested the services of Lieutenant Fred Kaka to clear away the crowds of commoners who congregate outside her house, begging her to cure cancer, AIDS and paralysis among other diseases. Even so, people did not obey and tricked the poor lieutenant because, as soon as he walked away, they came back to pick on the so-called miracle-maker. As a drastic result, he with his troopers settled the episode holding high-powered rifles and firing a hail of bullets in the air, breaking up the masses that ran away shrieking in terror. Since then, no one else believed that any grace should splay itself in front of her house.

"And guess what, Dr. Mike! Dr. Isabelle said to Miss. Kabaguyoi that she met her mother in Kigali at the very moment in which the dame died in New York. You see, sir."

"Enough, little fool! This small talk does not add up. Those bosom buddies came up with this barefaced lie because they have no good excuses for Dr. Isabelle's drug overdose." Dr. Mike expressed his aversion to mystic justifications for the dilemmas of the material existence.

"Do you think they are just making things up?"

"I do not believe these groundless rumors that Dr. Isabelle's dying mother has discovered that the Dark Lord is about to land here as a flame coming from the profundities of the Nyabarongo River."

Although Dr. Mike implied that he was not enjoying that unreasoned talk, the Twa kept up an irritating questioning and everlasting speaking, hoping that the Englishman dealt with such concern. In contrast, an unreasonably, spiritual subject drove the doctor to an uncool temper. Throughout his life, he had carried out a fruitless search for a god as a shoulder to cry on, for a god who happened to be near the needy, or for a god who minded and noticed. Therefore, he turned into a radical atheist whose beliefs were to him alone. He was against the globalization of the

religious faith and had a protective varnish of indifference over his antisocial disbelief. In short, if he did not believe in God, how could he accept the presence of Abigor in Kigali? He was a crusader who had spent most of his lifetime on the road, running a philanthropic, medical care wherever a natural or social disaster existed. Until his late teens, he had been an average believer. However, after seeing the hardship, pain, and misery of the human being for more than thirty years of work, he had petrified and closed his heart to the Divine Salvation. He used to say that life had introduced him to an unfeeling god who was a heavy-handed disciplinarian, holding a slender whip to inflict pain just on the weakest people, and with this in mind, he went toward the nihilism like a vengeful spirit.

"I believe, Dr. Mike, and I would not bet my money on it. Would you do?"

Struggling to get rid of the annoying killjoy who was spoiling his leisure moments, Dr. Mike grabbed the Pygmy by the scruff of his neck, squeezing and shaking him, willingly. He kicked him away, trying to stop the maddening chitchat, and spoke harshly, bawling the Twa out.

"It is all gibberish, dude!" Cried Dr. Mike, sharply. "Why the hell would the Destroyer choose this godforsaken land for his terrestrial tour? Nor would he want to work that much. If he comes to this land, he will not have a goddamn bath in a river. Lucifer will head north, trying to contain the Inkotanyis and their Rwandan Patriotic Front, the last hope for the ill-fated Tutsis of Kigali. Let me have my primus on my own, Tharcisse Mugabe. Go sell your poppies of hell and put your idiotic questions to your holy Yankee doctor. I will strangle you because you want my girl. Hahaha."

Dr. Mike's outburst of fury frightened Tharcisse Mugabe. He pulled away, hurried down the stairs and out into the street, fearing to get another tight slap. He wised up that his friend had drunk too much and was delighted, dropping jokes to the Tutsi girls wearing slinky clothes, going past him to show their pert bottoms, moving hips full of life.

Domitilla did not deny advice to anyone, and she had already alerted the Pygmy in love about the danger of his fascination for the American, medical woman.

How shameful, Tharcisse Mugabe! You are always hanging round the Doc, missus of Dr. Mike. Why don't you get wise to yourself and get with a Twa? One of these days, that medicine man will rip open your belly, fill you with bullets or pay a Hutu to get a better job done for him!

Tharcisse Mugabe was whispering and running away from the doctor.

What would happen if Dr. Mike were the so-called beast? After all, isn't he who is always close to her, taking advantage of her goodwill?

He quickened the pace to get distance from Dr. Mike, who was drunk and heartbroken about the chaotic situation of the public health in Rwanda, which was alarmingly out of control. Tharcisse Mugabe fled, carrying his doubts and reeling with questions. Despite this, he could hear the British man yelling at him. Doctor Mike was standing on the porch of the bar, holding a thin stem of grevillea that served as a column to a low thatched roof.

"Run, you little coward! Go to skulk behind the petticoats of Dr. Isabelle. If there's anything Apollyon likes in this country, it must be a Twa!"

Dr. Mike burst out laughing as every hardworking devil does at the close of a busy day:

"Hahaha."

VI - THE CLAY

The Twas would sing this sad song:

Ayee ... ayee ... ayee

Clay is hard ... ayee

Clay has no more value

Clay used to give me meat that I could often eat with other things

Clay gave me sorghum, and I could drink sorghum beer

Clay gave me beans, and I could eat very well with lots of other things ... ayee

Leave me alone, I am tired of the black value of clay

The plastic cups, dishes and pans have come

Ayeeeeee...

Once, Mr. Habimana visited the 'Twas' community in Kigali, and in order to impose his will, Hutu security guards accompanied him. He approached the elderly, and presented a paper, asking the Pygmies to sign it or put an identification mark on it instead.

"I need to use the swamps of Bugesera in conjunction with you."

Domitilla probed the Tutsi farmer.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I am testing a new cultivation."

"What does it mean?"

"I am going to grow a new plant there, but you won't take any losses."

"May we keep collecting our clay?"

"Yes, please, feel free."

"How much would you pay us for some land, Mr. Habimana?"

"Well, I know what the poor need most, and so, I do not intend to put only money in this business. I brought a truck brimming with food as a down payment, and in a matter of days, I will pay the remaining balance in cash."

The farmer was a skilled negotiator and knew that a group of people who were exposed to the hardship of hunger like better the material resource. Then, he ordered the driver to bring the vehicle to the center of the village and unloaded bananas, oranges, potatoes, and beans. Seeing an abundance of food never witnessed in the community, hungry, skinny children ran toward the fruits and crunched them all, forcing the food into their mouths. Their mothers quarreled among themselves by sacks of beans, and in a while, they spread the products by the huts. Domitilla, in turn, was concerned about the farmer's attitude and pleaded with Mukono to take back the foodstuff.

"Please, stop them, Mukono!"

"How, Domitilla?"

"I have no idea. Please, find a way to straighten some of this mess."

"I will not take the food out of the mouths of children."

The Twas look at Mr. Habimana, imagining how he would react. They were in a delicate situation for not having how to pay back a truckload of goods. They were thus in silence and afraid of what was going on. The farmer presented a contract to purchase the muddy land that the Twas had to accept, and Emmanuel Habimana was happy for getting a good deal with the greatest of ease. Although the Twas knew that the fruits and vegetable would last no more than three days of consumption, they agreed with the buyer the way he wanted. The Hutus who were escorting the rich Tutsi threatened to arrest the Pygmies. Detention was one of the worst fears of the Twas in Rwanda. They suffered discrimination even as free men and their condition got worse during incarceration, since the guards and the detainees mistreated them only because they were Twas, and usually killed them. In late 1987, an NGO of the United States of America raised funds to buy a generous piece of wetland in the marshes of Lake Mugesera beyond the Southeast boundaries of the Rural Kigali where the Twas withdrew their clay to manufacture mud pots. Even though the NGO endowed the Pygmies with it, the possession of arable land by the Pygmies only for extracting clay was an intolerable luxury in the Rwanda of those extreme days, a country in need of hills for planting.

Although the tragic events that occurred in 1994 affected plenty of businesses, in the early 1900's, the African Development Bank financed several agricultural projects in Rwanda.

The government implanted them with the intention to reduce the food deficit and improve the living conditions of the rural people.

The main characteristic of the Rwandan farms is their small territorial dimension. In the current case, to access agricultural credit, Mr. Habimana had to show that he owned vacant lands with an area greater than the Good Hope Farm, and with sufficient size to enable a new profitable project.

He chose to drain the wetlands for the cultivation of plants as a means of generating economic performance to bear the burden of financing the enterprise. Agronomists of the government suggested:

The incorporation of the free lands where Twa's exercised extracting activities not managed in an environmentally sound manner.

Through influence peddling and course fees that he paid to civil servants in the management offices of the legal bureaucracy, he could take over the property of others, receiving a title of land possession:

He needed the marshes from which the Pygmies unlawfully removed clay, and systematically damaged the local environment.

After the visit of Mr. Habimana to the Twa's village, Tharcisse Mugabe commented on the subject with the American Medical Practitioner.

"Dr. Isabelle, guess what! Mukono and his partner Domitilla gave our wetlands for Mr. Habimana to use with us."

"I know him, Tharcisse. He is the boss of Rose's boyfriend, Elizaphan. Have you allowed it for no charge?"

"No, Dr. Isabelle, he paid honestly for the business under the terms of the contract."

"How much did he pay you?"

"He gave us food, a lot of fruits as a paying in advance."

"This doesn't seem fair. Keep an eye out and let me aware of any reason to call the deal off."

"We cannot square up with Mr. Habimana, Dr. Isabelle."

"Do you mean a freight of bananas? Do not worry! I settle that with the smartass."

* * * * *

In the first few days following the sale of the Bugesera's soaked lands to the coffee grower, everything worked well. However, in a short time, the Twas began to have difficulties of accessing the place, since security guards prevented them from getting in. The situation worsened after the visit of some agricultural technicians of the African Development Bank who came to check the conditions of the terrain to approve the contract.

Mr. Habimana had written a business proposal to get a bank loan, and the release of money depended on the approval of a long-term planning. Regrettably, the inspectors of the ADB condemned the extraction and the finality for which the Twas were collecting clay, and therefore, the negotiation that had been on target slowed its pace, the interest in the agricultural project fell off, and things ran into difficulty.

"We cannot accept this situation, Mr. Habimana. We will not approve an agricultural project in these wetlands while a group of individuals continues to take away stuff from here for a purpose unrelated to agricultural means. So, you must prove to us from A to Z that you will fix things or this endeavor will not get off the ground."

"Are you serious? What's wrong with a few clay pots they do?"

"The point, Mr. Habimana, is that you did not mention in your forecast the extraction activities on the same land to where our bank is to direct its resources."

Even though Emmanuel Habimana did not care about the misery of others, he tried to make the litigant auditors of the African Development Bank feel pity of the Pygmies.

"Do not elevate petty things into a rule, my dear friends. The insignificant amount of clay the Twas withdraw from this land does not affect its productivity. Besides, they are just a pitiful group of unfortunates without a pot to piss in."

"And then? I am sorry, but we are not here to get into social issues of your country. Our mission is to guarantee funds for this long-term investment, and it is highly technical, going down to the smallest details. So, do not get us wrong and understand our position, please."

Emmanuel Habimana felt threatened in his commercial interests, and, relying on his deal abilities, chose not to oppose the inspectors and enforced his best argument in negotiations: bribery.

"Perhaps, the three of us can reach an agreement through some extra fees. After all, as you admitted, we are technicians."

The infelicitous cards laid on the table seemed to backfire, since the ADB research workers got angry and turned down the attempt to corrupt them.

"Am I wrong or you are trying to buy off us, Mr. Habimana?"

The Tutsi farmer, seeing that the African Development Bank officials rejected a financial settlement, stepped back.

"I would not dare, in any way, since the ADB's business negotiations are above board. Even so, you have to find a workable solution to keep the ball rolling because my business is the blood that flows in the veins of the Rwandese economy."

"We understand you, Mr. Habimana. Our institution works within social-purpose platforms and has commitments to the social problems of Africa by signing various multinational accords in this regard. However, things here are illegal and we see an empirical, outdated way to extract clay from this land. And though you have excellent records in our bank files, we cannot stand for this situation, and we will reveal it to our head office whether you do like it or not."

"All right! I agreed to it. What do I have to do then?"

"Hand in an addendum to us."

"How could it be?"

"You ought to send us an additive term to this project, legalizing and enabling the extraction of clay by the Twas."

"Who cares about this little clay that they remove from here?"

"We do care no matter how you look at it or however little it is, Mr. Habimana. Why should we put money into a project with one foot in the grave?"

"Okay! Let us do another planning, then. How much do you charge for this service?"

"Do you mean us? We will not do it for you, but we can send for someone from abroad to issue a preliminary draft, providing technical guidelines for you."

"Do as you see fit, please."

"They will be here next week to give you a price quotation for this work."

"Are all these petty regulations necessary? Couldn't they give me this paperwork in Gitarama tomorrow?"

"You find it hard to understand us well, Mr. Habimana. These experts live in South Africa. The African Development Bank accredits only renowned technicians to run its program works. They, for instance, will stay in Kigali or right here in Bugesera for at least six months, and you are to invite them by official business writing."

"It is a rip-off! Poor me! Are you crazy?"

"That is not the worst. Making an environmental impact report or even drawing up a preliminary study takes time, especially in a sensitive ecosystem like a wetland rich in papyrus, bamboos, and palms. They have to monitor and measure the rainy seasons, list plants, animals, and catalog their relationships with the floods... It really takes much time."

The Tutsi rancher cuts off the inspectors to move over his own view.

"Stop, please! Are all these expenses on me? Sorry to interrupt, but I am not the richest man in the world. I do not plant oil, gold or diamonds. I just grow coffee instead."

"You're telling..."

"What is the plan b for this deadlock?"

The dishonest auditors reached the point to where they had handled the conversation. It was the exact moment to strike a fatal blow to the Rwandan contractor. They proposed to him:

"You must take two attitudes to approve the loan, Mr. Habimana: one to erase the past and another to prevent more wrongdoings."

"What are they?"

"You will not admit T was accessing this property anymore, ensuring that no more clay extraction in the swamps of Bugesera will happen."

"Yeah! It hurts me, but I am going to kick the Pigmies out of this place. What is the past related condition?"

"We have to forget the aggression to the environment in this swamp, turning a blind eye to it."

"They only took a little bit of mud from this land. In fact, they don't make clay buildings, yet simple pots they sell in the marketplace."

"We assume they do, and you must convince us not to cite in our report to the Investment Division of the ADB this systematic loss of natural resources."

"What would happen to our contract if you do this?"

"No big deal if we do it. You will have to replace the clay, collecting the equal amount of it from another legal source of extraction to mitigate the worst aspects of the damage."

"Feel free to do whatever you want. I settle this with just two truckloads from Gitarama".

"Right, Mr. Habimana. We agree, but you have to remember that the loan will take two to three years to be released to your bank account after it is approved."

"Three years? Why would it take so long?"

"This is the required period to the ecosystem gets back to normal."

The farmer retook the main point at the beginning of the negotiation.

"Let us be reasonable and practical, gentlemen. What can we do to wipe the slate clean, overcoming this problem?"

"We are now on the same page. Well, Mr. Habimana, the question boils down to the fine you mentioned at the start of our conversation, under the best conditions, obviously."

The auditors of the African Development Bank forced the rich farmer to pay a fat bribe in order not to disrupt the financial support. After

settling their differences, they came to terms on the contract. Despite this, Emmanuel Habimana was suffering grievously and declared war on the Pigmies.

He was poorer! He got the raw end of the deal. The damned Twas of Kigali were removing the precious clay of his wetlands of Bugesera, and in view of that illegal conduct, he was obliged to take an immediate and corrective action against the thieves of his mineral resources. In summary, he would teach the Twas a lesson that they would never forget!

The farmer realized that the business in Rwanda had become abusive during the years of 1993 and 1994. The cost of repairs and maintenance of his rural property was high. Once, he talked to his supervisor, the Tutsi François Mukakalisa, about the management of the GH farm. He thought that the economy was in recession.

"My faithful friend François Mukakalisa, the Rwandan market runs short of money this year."

"How can you say that, boss? This farm is running at full blast, the turfs are fertile, and the hills abound in coffee. Even better, the grain silos are untapped and the trucks do not stop getting in and out of this place. In brief, the business is booming and everything performs well."

"Time is a little tight now that the end of the world is near at hand, and besides, I feel something sinister in the production. You see, my coffee is my crystal ball."

"Things can't be that bad, sir."

"The costs rose sky-high, and I am afraid this company is going to close down soon."

"Oh no, that is bad tidings, sir. I cut the pay of the workers as ordered and fired with no right to anything those who did not put up with this. The payments have been overdue, and each employee is doing the job of two people. We should be in the black, sir."

"No, the company has been deep in debt. Yet do not let it bother you, considering that I have more to blame. You are a competent leader, command the people regularly and will be a manager someday."

"Your son inherited your skills and deserves to run this farm, Mr. Habimana. He only needs to harden his heart a little bit. Is someone bothering you?"

The farmer had to bribe some authorities.

"Dishonest dealers are corrupting commercial transactions. Every day, I have to set aside more money to buy the sympathy of the Hutus. I am sick of this shortsighted war perverting people and leading this country to the edge of anarchy with a generation of lazy parasites. Today, finding a young man who knows how to wield a plow is rare, but in each corner, we ran into a bunch of them who are handy with weapons."

"Business uses to be bad during harsh times, sir. We have to be patient until this war is over. Please, do not throw in the towel yet because we can survive this bad time and everything will work out."

"I hope you are right, François. You and I have been doing our best just to sustain the greed of the blackmailers who leads this slaying of our race. I guess we need to pray now that only by the grace of God, we will get through this storm."

* * * * *

I adopted an indirect method of monitoring the Pygmy children's health although Dr. Mike thought I was biting off more than I could chew. I had already had sufficient of his complaints that made me want to tear my hair out.

Let the Twas move on with their life on their own, Dr. Isabelle!

I bought a small second-hand scale and gave it to Tharcisse Mugabe so that every two weeks he weighed the village children. He scribbled a table on a piece of paper where he penned down the names of the kids in alphabetical order in the rows and the weeks in the columns, fairly well. Every month, he kept me informed about the subject, coming with the latest update. Once, I noticed a widespread weight decrease in them, and therefore, I questioned him.

"You have left something out, this time, Tharcisse Mugabe. I doubt that so many kids have slimmed down sharply this way."

"I see no mistake, Dr. Isabelle."

Noticing the conviction of my friend, my heart sank and I wondered if an outbreak of an opportunistic viral disease had affected the villagers in the Kigali community.

"Are all these children sick? Why didn't you write down anything about these two ones here?"

"The missing two died this week, the second of them last night."

I got disturbed. The probable epidemic was sufficiently severe to cause the death of two little infants.

"God of Heaven! What the hell brought that on?"

"Everyone knows it."

"So, what did they die of?"

As if he were telling me something ordinary, he affirmed.

"They starved to death."

"Jesus! They were almost plump about a month ago."

I was shocked and sat in a chair. Something had happened since the last time I had been to the Pygmy commune.

"What might have caused this in your opinion?"

"We do not make pots anymore, Dr. Isabelle. Almost everyone is now panhandling or living on begging, but Kigali does not provide so many alms."

"Why have you stopped pottering?"

"We do not have from where to collect clay."

"What about the swamps of Bugesera? Have they dried up?"

"Yep, that's a yep. Have you forgotten they no longer belong to us?"

"Of course not, but you have permission to take small amounts of clay, as agreed with the farmer."

"Mr. Habimana gave up the deal, and the situation isn't likely to get better soon. I see only one solution to all this, madam."

"What's on your mind?"

"We need you to lead us to the farmer. We want our clay back."

I took my motorcycle and went with Tharcisse Mugabe to the Twa hamlet. They were gearing up to get clay in the swamps of Bugesera in a clear challenge to the orders of the rich landowner, yet I could not ask them to be quiet, given that their lives would be on the line without their means of subsistence. On the way back, I screamed at the unfairness of it all.

I led the Twa to find Dr. Mike.

"Don't forget he always drops by a pub for a drink."

During the whole day, we have been trying to locate the Englishman, yet he was another time on a mysterious trip. On the doctor's returning, the Pygmy met him at the hotel front desk. The Londoner came down to see Tharcisse Mugabe downstairs because the staff of the Thousand Hills did not let the Twa walk in the building.

"What is going on, Tharcisse? Has anything gone wrong with Dr. Isabelle?"

Accepting my invitation, Dr. Mike walked to my house. Once inside, he looked at me keenly, checking if something unusual had occurred. His eyes were full of curiosity. After doing some indirect questions, he realized that all was well, what made him more curious. We talked about the United States and Britain, describing to each other our routines in our countries of origin. When we reach high into the nighttime, he started a conversation with hints of alluring content. He thought I was not aware of his sweet talks and tricks to have me in his arms.

I wonder if Dr. Mike knows I am not one of his Tutsi girls.

I let him seduce me and did all I could to keep him pleased, as I knew if I fulfilled his wishes, he would not refuse to take me to visit the Good Hope Farm. Otherwise, convincing him to do something against his principles

and favorable to the Pygmies would be a difficult task because he found the Pygmies doomed to extinction.

"Don't let your heart rule your head, Dr. Isabelle. The Twas are a dying breed simply because nobody can fight the natural selection of species. Since the time of Charles Darwin, we have heard that the big fish eats the small one. Seeing a woman of science and literature not agreeing to this amazes me."

"Please, do not be fatalistic! Do not treat them as if they were irrational beings. You ought not to confuse the issues because we are talking about conscious choices and not mere instincts."

"Those Twas of mixed race will be the ones to survive."

"You also think pigs can fly, don't you? I have never heard of an interracial marriage involving a Twa. The odds of that happening are remote."

"Fool! Who said I mean matrimony?"

"No?"

"I did not! The maintenance of the Twa genes will come through the rapes against the unhappy Pygmy girls. Hahaha."

"Sometimes, I find you monstrous, Dr. Mike. You should not jeer at the misfortunes of others. If you have no faith in the Divine, at least, fear a supposed encounter with Him."

The rapes committed by the Hutus have an anthropological purpose. Hahaha!

I got all dressed up and invited Dr. Mike to dine and drink a French wine. At night, I went to bed with him to perform his fantasies, and after I have poured him that third glass of liquor, I presented the bitter bill of my courtesan service. On that occasion, if I had asked him to face alone the total Turkish Army in an open field, he would do it for me, and on behaving this way, how could he deny my request to challenge the interests of an ill-tempered, pig-headed farmer who disliked Pygmies?

In the early morning, when I saw that sleepy man, after a tasteless and hurried breakfast, complains about a headache, with a look of untidiness, I smiled. He got on with the Tutsis woman; nevertheless, he knew nothing about American women. The English lord would have trouble if he lived in New York. Before leaving, he said that he would strive to set up a meeting. As he was upset, I feared he directed his anger against Tharcisse Mugabe, and this was what happened, soon after, when he localized the Twa negotiating pots of African violets in the local market. People commented to me that the English doctor was not in his right mind when he grabbed the unfortunate chap and noisily knocked his head in the public square. Some passers-by had to restrain him, and once Tharcisse Mugabe got rid of the Londoner, he ran snaking his way so fast that even a hungry cheetah would not catch him on a weeded savanna. Dr. Mike chased the Twa, accelerating the Land Rover through Kigali, yelling like a lunatic, yet the fugitive was swift like a goat and easily slipped away.

He sprinted and only stopped in the back of beyond. The doctor stayed behind, mumbling excuses for perplexed and misunderstanding listeners.

That was just the trouble! Tharcisse Mugabe claimed to be a good bloke, but he was a sly architect instead of the fool you made him out to be. That Pigmy was a wolf in sheep's clothing. That was what he was for real: a big one. The goddamn bad apple was putting crazy ideas into Dr. Isabelle's head!

Seeing no alternative, Dr. Mike contacted his friends at the British Embassy to arrange a meeting with Mr. Habimana in Gitarama, so that the Tutsi did not slam the door in our faces. On hearing from third parties that the foreigners demanded land to the Pygmies, the rural entrepreneur objected. Even so, before the unyielding insistence of the British Ambassador, he agreed. Despite that, he was intransigent regarding the presence of Tharcisse Mugabe on his farm.

His residence was neither for slackers nor for dope fiends. A Twa could not set foot on the GHF!

On a Thursday afternoon, Dr. Mike and I took the path of the red roads around Kigali, going to Gitarama. I was looking at the landscape from a new angle and I saw unknown images. We went into the rural life with its beauty and simple people. We also listened to the birds singing their sweet songs: wood storks, sunbirds, nightingales, coucals, turacos, and weavers. Some small animals crossed our path. Nature has been kind to Rwanda, spreading beauty everywhere.

Dr. Mike parked the Land Rover and whispered, in order not to interrupt the mating of the birdies.

"Look at those awesome birds there, Dr. Isabelle!"

"Where are they, Dr. Mike?"

"Silence, please be still! Do not chase the turacos away. They are ahead in the podocarp on the right, lilting bird whispers of joy. That pair is about to make love."

"They are beautiful."

"How about putting a trap over there to catch one of them? On our return, maybe we have it in a cage."

"No way! Have you lost your mind? By what right would we take away the freedom of the dear little things?"

"I am simply a bird watcher, sweetheart. Hahaha." Dr. Mike laughed.

I think the doctor had suggested me this for mockery. He knew my attitude in favor of the inviolability of nature that still exists in the world, and I do not agree with hunting, except for subsistence. He started the car and

we journeyed across the rural Kigali. He had taken a path that kept us in touch with the Rwandese biodiversity. We needed that experience in the turbulent country.

On arriving at the front gate of the Good Hope Farm, a chill came over me, and I felt like a medieval knight going into a dangerous, big castle to save the damsel from a heartless lord, the wrongdoer of the season. I felt as if I were traveling to meet a Mwami, former Tutsi King, and not only a simple farmer. The grandness of the topic made me anxious. Immediately, the stories that my father told me, with a book in hand, on the side of my bed, when I was eight, surfaced in my mind like a flower blooming after a long-term drought. The place had such charm that in no way resembled the Rwanda of streams, slums, and poverty I had experienced until then. The abundance in the GHF had a monochrome performance, as the green dominated the environment. That farm seemed to be something out of a fairytale taking me back to my childhood, and additionally, the more I penetrated the Good Hope Farm with its orchards of fruit trees, the more I remembered the mornings in which my mother called me for breakfast.

Please, do get up, sweetie, because it is time to eat! The food is ready!

Back to reality, coming from the local mill, a strong smell of fresh coffee filled the air and got through my nostrils. It was so strong that it seemed to get inside my womb, and I understood why Rose was concerned when I had my caffeine fix to ward off sleep in the warm and humid days after we have lunch at my house.

Oh, my God, Dr. Isabelle! Take a small nap and do not go against yourself. Do not drink so much coffee because it is horrible for the health!

Living in the Good Hope Farm, in summary, seemed to stick your head inside a bag of roasted coffee, open your lungs and breathe deeply. It was really a paradise for coffee aficionados.

I saw secondary crops, for example, bean, rice, and corn, even though the first thing that popped into my head was the ubiquitous coffee greening the hills. From afar, a dairy herd of ankole cattle was on the loose, grazing in a pasture field, a green meadow around a pond. In the background, beyond the flock, the laborers were cutting the hills in a series of level areas, terracing the land to grow crops, mostly countless rows of coffee trees linked by steps, one after the other.

François Mukakalisa, a Tutsi overseer, came along to greet us. He asked us to hand over the pickup to him and passed it to another employee who took the car to the local garage. The farmhouse was large, yet it was not

luxurious. A man, who had accumulated such amount of money over a lifetime, could not have the profile of a great spender of funds.

The wife of Mr. Habimana, a full-figured Hutu woman of white careless hair, at about 55 years old, named Béatha Habimana, welcomed us. She was in a spacious and affordable sofa as simple as the other worn-out furniture. Except for a color picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, not even a single ornament was on the walls of that house with antique and disused furniture. If it were not for a family portrait on a bookcase shelf, a grandfather clock, and some branches of red roses in an improvised clay Twa jar, the living room with its rustic stuff could be confused with an attached to an office.

An old radio, a family relic, tuned to the Thousand Hills with its rate propaganda instilling animosity against the Tutsis drew our attention to its words of race hatred and sectarian radicalism while we were awaiting the coffee grower.

Béatha Habimana offered us a pure espresso.

Do you want a cup of coffee?

"Welcome, dears! My name is Béatha Habimana. My Husband left word for you to await him. So, please, do come in and have a seat because he is overseeing a shipment of a batch of coffee to Belgium. I have heard of you, Dr. Isabelle, and I have been looking forward to seeing you in the flesh. My dear lady, we meet at last."

She had a sweet voice and a tired physiognomy of a person who has been working hard over various years.

"Has my name showed up in Gitarama before my presence?"

"Yes, I heard some news about you in the Thousand Hills or read something in a newspaper."

"They are all kind, I hope, Mrs. Habimana?"

"Hahaha. They broadcast a little of everything, darling. You are a real character and a case in point, Dr. Isabelle. Every suffering woman looks up to you and envies your freedom of speech. I see that you are a young woman who is part of the modern world, so you should not worry about the malicious comments. Most women in Rwanda are still in the days in which our place was in the home. That is why controversies over your manners sometimes come alive among these illiterate people. If I were at your age, I would be at your side shooting at sinful people on the streets for one reason or the other, too. You see I just loved the story about how you hammer three paramilitaries. Hahaha. Above all, you are brave."

"I am sorry to disappoint you, but people love to gossip. I did not defeat anybody. The Hutus were afraid to hurt me seriously on a public street."

"I play that you find what you seek on the road of life because you are a kind-hearted woman and merit it. On my part, I advised Emmanuel to

forget this issue of Twas' land, since we do not need it. I also warned him that mistreating Pygmies bodes ill for the future."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. I hope your husband is as understanding as you."

She described a lease of land between the landowner and the Twas.

"You ought not to count on it because Emmanuel is somewhat stubborn. However, I will try to convince him to help you, seeing as you do much for the underclass. I just do not understand why you make the case for the lazy Pygmies. Emmanuel tried to help them by employing Twas here, but it is always the same old story: they do not learn anything, since they are slow on the uptake. The Twas only help to walk dogs or scare birds. Certainly, if you really need, they can perform small tasks as errand boys, and even so, to put across unimportant messages. Once, we tried to work in partnership with some Pygmies, leasing small unproductive allotments of our hills. The pieces of land had been idle for a few years anyway, but beggars cannot be choosers. We would split down the middle what they produced, yet it was a disaster, given that the weaklings could not handle the job and preserve the plantations. Many had their land taken by Tutsis or Hutus, since the Twas have no strength to maintain what is theirs. Furthermore, one of them switched his lot by a few bottles of booze, and things became very demanding, what led Emmanuel to reclaim the plots from the hands of third parties, and as there were deaths, he had to walk escorted by armed guards, even getting into trouble with the law."

"Ordinary people misinterpret them, Mrs. Habimana. These comments are all wicked lies." I explained that people made false allegations about them.

Mr. Habimana's wife was not interested in my judgment and changed the subject.

"Is it true that your mother's spirit appeared to you, Dr. Isabelle?" She probed me.

"Perhaps! I could agree with you to a certain extent."

As Dr. Mike did not like mystical subjects, he excused himself from the room and went to the veranda with his down-to-earth thoughts just to watch the intense agrarian routine of the GHF, since it was a unique opening to lay eyes on the toil of the land. He was enchanted with the hustle and bustle of the fieldwork in the harvest of coffee.

"I would like my mom to show up a few times to me, Doctor. I have so much to tell her. How could you establish a contact with a being from beyond?"

I could not answer such a question, without explaining my singular sensitivity. Yet the front door was ajar, and from the outside, Mr. Know-it-all, who knew, saw and heard everything, jumped in.

"Mrs. Habimana, look for a Twa of Kigali called Mukono and ask him for a sip of tea. Hahaha."

"What are you talking about, sir?"

I spoke to her.

"Don't listen to him, madam. This man is a misguided heathen with no luck who doubts God's existence, and he is mocking us. The only thing he knows for sure is that he will burn on a stone of hell after he dies."

Dr. Mike kept on laughing.

"Hahaha."

Béatha Habimana made a sign of the cross and lit a small candle in a pedestal next to a statue of Our Lady, in an attempt to immunize her home against the pack of sins that Dr. Mike carried in his heart. I scolded him.

"Oh! Dr. Mike, stop bothering us. Isn't there any pretty woman out there?"

Béatha Habimana responded.

"We do have a beautiful Tutsi in this region, a tall girl named Rose Kabaguyoi. She is always dolled up."

"Rose is a nurse at the Kigali Hospital Center. I almost forgot she lives in this neighborhood. Is she at home?"

"She is in downtown Gitarama. Lamentably, she is going out with an ugly Hutu called Elizaphan."

I laughed at the comment.

"Hahaha. I think he is a nice person."

"Oh, no! Please, do not be so kind. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but it is easy to see that she can do better."

We had already been waiting for a long time when Dr. Mike tried to cancel the meeting and arrange another date for the visit, but there was too much at stake for me to give up. He used to say that I did not dispense with a good struggle when I got a thing in my head or was working on something I want.

"No, Dr. Mike, please. We will stay here until the end."

A long hour and a half had passed when the grower Emmanuel Habimana walked into the room, bringing a shadow to the enlightening conversation with her spouse. He looked down, studying me with an intriguing, searching expression as a background for two bright, curious eyes.

How dare you come to my home to contest me in a trade negotiation?

"Good afternoon, Dr. Mike and Dr. Isabelle. I'm sorry about being late. Rwanda has a lot to thank the both of you because health is the greatest wealth."

I said:

"It is kind of you, but someone has to assume duties in the medical field in this country."

"My wife admires you, Dr. Isabelle, and I bet my bottom dollar that she has offered you a job as an administrator in this farm."

"My duties are distinct from planting or breeding, sir."

"You see! Until yesterday, I'd swear that the business of the Red Cross was restricted to health care."

"Since you brought up the subject, I have to tell you that public health issues bring me here."

"What do you mean?"

"I am here to report the death of two Twa children from the community of Kigali."

"Why do you treat this subject with me instead of forwarding it to the government and its funeral service in the capital?"

"It is because they died of hunger."

"Some things in this country are disagreeable, since the youngsters are walking along wrong paths and getting lost in blind alleys. Only very few people work to produce food for a legion of parasites, who do nothing but pick up rifles and machetes. The poverty in this country killed your friends. What do you want from me on this issue?"

"Mr. Habimana, I wish to know if you could be kind to free the access to the swamps of Bugesera for the Twas so that they get the essential clay."

The rancher knew the reason of our visit.

"I would do that, Dr. Isabelle, and I wish I could help you, but I am not the one who forbade them to enter that land."

"So, who did?"

"Environmental control agencies and the African Development Bank, which finances my project in the swamps, did. Extracting clay from that place is illegal."

"They depend on pottery to go through life."

"I am aware of this. By the way, I use the utensils they manufacture because they are good, but the large supply of plastic containers at giveaway prices makes the selling of their pots impracticable. Your friends should quit this job and soon enter another branch of business, as pottery is doomed to fail."

Being curious about why Mr. Habimana insisted on taking the land of the Pygmies, I inquired:

"What's special in those lands to get your attention?" He explained:

"They have nothing out of the ordinary. I am just draining the wetlands to begin a new plantation."

"What will you grow there, bananas or coffee?"

"No! I am operating a more profitable project. I am planting patchouli."

"What is it?"

He answered me:

"Patchouli is a plant that provides oil for the cosmetic industries to make perfume."

The farmer thought this culture would fit well into the swampy ecosystem of Bugesera. He took us to the rear of his home where he had planted some seedlings of patchouli. The homegrown plants seemed any sort of lettuce. He profiled them in line in an experimental patch. I could not believe my eyes because Emmanuel Habimana was sentencing some human beings to eternal poverty and suffering or even to death only to grow his superfluous fragrance. It was too much to handle, and I spoke, hastily.

"You ought to be ashamed, Mr. Habimana! How could you take the land of the Twas because of this?"

"I did it for the best, Doctor. This product will put the Good Hope Farm on the foreign market."

* * * * *

He saw the small planting as a child that he had adopted, and it was understandable that he was keen to put into practice his new venture. The farmer's interest in patchouli came from a financial demand in a time of emergency. In short, it was a bet on better days.

"You are heavily in debt, Mr. Habimana!"

The rural owner reasoned that Isabelle was a tough negotiator and was determined to fight hard for some interests that clashed with his convictions. He analyzed the facts and saw that he should not underestimate her ability to cause him some economic or political damage in Rwanda. He lamented not having known earlier that he would face the American doctor once getting into negotiations with the Twas. He did not know what to do with her, so he tried to gain some time, giving her a little breath. He was more afraid of Dr. Mike, as he knew that the Englishman had prestige with the Hutu rulers. On that account, he was cautious in the bargaining.

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"I had a testing day, Doctor, and I need some rest. I do not feel well opposing a hardworking young woman like you. Thus, let us take a break, coming to a preliminary understanding, and put this issue on standby until someday further. In the meantime, I will look into this case for a while and return to deal with you, later."

"What do you propose?"

"Well, I will grant you a period of six months for your 'Twas pick up the clay of my land. Meanwhile, I will talk to the shareholders of this project. After this period, I will bring the subject up again if you haven't yet relocated them to a secure land somewhere else far from my property."

One semester of access to the raw material was not the right option. Nevertheless, Dr. Mike agreed with the idea and made me see that, under the present circumstances, it was fair and the only way to go. In addition, he explained that it was better to come to an immediate arrangement than go to the slow law service, given that the 'Twas called for emergency aid.

They needed it yesterday!

Although it was not a definitive solution, at least, I could use a break to sleep on the situation and find any alternative to pottery that was in free fall.

* * * * *

Emmanuel Habimana was a fox when it comes to business. He promised what he did not mean to fulfil because a great deal of money was involved. He could not push back the start of planting even for a week, and, especially, not for six months. Even so, he found not proper to confront two distinguished foreigners whom Rwandans held in high esteem, openly. He worked secretly then, mainly because he feared Dr. Mike's influence on government agencies.

Mrs. Habimana hugged us tightly, showed us out and said goodbye, wishing us a safe trip.

"It is a little dark. So, please, proceed with caution when driving by that curvy road. You are welcome to drop over anytime you feel like talking, dear fellows."

* * * * *

While we were riding back home, we cheerfully talked as though we were high school students playing during recess time. A sense of accomplishment gripped us after we succeeded in coming to an arrangement to the 'Twas' demand, and this put us in a brilliant mood. Once feeling relaxed, I could see how beautiful and prosperous was the countryside of the Good Hope Farm that was crowded with simple people and healthy animals. From afar, the coffee bushes looked like a slight layer of grass sliding down the slopes of the hills ahead as if they were a green veil down the back of a beautiful and fertile African mother.

The stress of the tough dialogue with Mr. Habimana produced physiological effects. As I had been holding my urine too long, an urge emerged, and I started to rub my legs, one in another, compressing my bladder. The doctor noticed my discomfort once I was not interested in his words anymore. He surveyed me.

"What is wrong, Dr. Isabelle?"

"Dr. Mike, we have to return, please."

"You must be joking! Did you forget anything there?"

He thought we should not see the farmer for a second time anytime soon, given that our presence in the property of the Habimanas that time ought to produce negative effects.

"My bladder is full to bursting, Doctor."

"Why didn't you use the toilet of the Habimana residence?" He argued, reproachfully.

"I just need it now!"

He refused to go back to the Good Hope Farm, proposing that I dealt with the problem into any shrubbery nearby, and to encourage me with a manly manner, he added that he would do the same.

If I peed, he peed, too!

Although I found the suggestion ridiculous and inelegant at first, on looking back at the time, I remembered that I had already done some thoughtless things during night parties with friends in New York, and consequently, I got out of the vehicle. Cautiously, I walked into the woods, fearing the inconvenience of any rural worker caught me naked and helpless.

I may have stepped away more than I should because as soon as I was crouched in a remote point of the wildness, I heard a buzz heading towards me. I also noticed a narrow path about ten meters away, through which the workers took shortcuts between the trails across the farm. I went to the rear of a ravine to hide behind a shrub and kept looking in the direction whence the voices were getting tight. Then, I saw a party of eight militiamen stopping near where Canisous Rubuga already was talking with Mr. Habimana. The people in the group were unsettled and likely high on drugs or alcohol. Wearing multicolored and extravagant clothes, they seemed to form a group of punks in the Champs Élysées or hooligans in English pubs. Some of them edged their pocketknives with uncut stones and others were testing their machetes, moving them back and forth, knocking down branches of bushes.

What would happen if they decided to cut the clump where I was in?

Being found alone and half-undressed in the thicket by thugs would not be good. Under the circumstances, I was with a big problem,

sweating bullets. As a result, my legs started to shake and I had an itch. Then, when I made a sudden move trying to get settled, a small stone rolled downhill. Fortunately, the little background noise caught the attention of only one of the Hutus, a dauntless and strong man, taller than the rest. He looked to his left from where the sound had come, and our eyes seemed to meet. He came to me, and I almost jumped out of my skin and thought about introducing myself, speaking nonsense.

Hello, my name is Isabelle and I am just eavesdropping on you!

I also thought that something was going wrong and I did not feel safe enough to show myself to the interahamwes. While I was hearing his boots stepping on sticks, I slipped down to lie behind the bushes at a lower level. I could see him through a narrow slit in the foliage over my head. Right after, he stopped and looked around, listening acutely like a cheetah chasing a gazelle cub hidden in the tall grass of the Serengeti plains. Then, he unsheathed his knife, rubbing it on his trousers, and it seemed to me that he had sniffed some scent, sensing that something was not right. Nonetheless, no animal had the smell of lavender sap mixed with the odor of coffee, mud, cow dung, and urine that was flowing freely along my legs. Finally, when he was on guard, getting ready to launch his scythe in the right moment to catch me, I braced myself to react. However, luckily, an order from his leader ridded me of a crash against the militiaman.

"Hey! You there! Come to listen, too. Hasn't your mother taught you any manners, bastard?"

Canisous Rubuga severely admonished him, as the offense of absenting without permission was susceptible to punishment. This led the Hutu leader to get closer and land a strong open-palm slap in his subordinate's face to everyone see how he imposed discipline and hear the pedagogic sound.

My blood ran cold, and I stood motionless, imagining what those people spoke. Although the words sounded loud in my ears, they came distorted by the noises of machetes and laughs in unison, and additionally, they talked to one another in Kinyarwanda. On that account, I wished that Dr. Mike were with me getting the meaning of the incomprehensible phrases. I tiptoed out on the sly not to show myself, and after I got into the vehicle, and we were away on the road, I told the doctor what had happened, asking why the evil-looking weirdos were with Mr. Habimana.

He explained:

"The Hutus are trying to get money. They have been eyeing the coffee grower's fortune for years."

I argued.

"I agree up to a point, Dr. Mike. I think they were amicably dealing with one another in a normal tone and speaking away happily in a sort of friendly conversation."

"Are you telling me that you witnessed a nice dialogue between a Tutsi and paramilitaries? You felt anxious to urinate and got distracted. Hahaha."

I made a worried expression, and Dr. Mike added cordially.

"Please, Dr. Isabelle, take things easy and do not make it personal. You should stop running around trying to correct the world's wrongs."

Realizing that I needed something to calm me down, he started humming songs from the sixties and seventies of the 20th century, the time of the counterculture and the height of the hippie movement. He had the liberal and carefree behavior of the people of that time. As he was driving, the music ran through his mind, and he recited refrains from Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin's hits with his tuned voice. At my request, he sang my favorite song of that singer: *Me and Bobby Maggee*, after whistling the tune of *Johnny B. Goode* by Chuck Berry. He did not forget to devote chords to Bob Dylan, his longtime friend, according to the Londoner. As the joy grew, the saloon guitar player was about to swear that he composed some of those melodies. Surely, a musician was not there to stop singing.

"Please, take a whiskey in the glove box, Dr. Isabelle."

I took a Johnnie Walker, served him a generous dose and had a sip from the bottle, drinking and singing to celebrate the 'Twas' fortune. While we were driving up and down mountains under a starry sky, the fullest and brightest moon I have ever seen in my life came after us. The moon was so big that I thought it was near the ground just to get a touch of my hand as soon as the Land Rover reached the summit of any hill. Perhaps, it was getting closer just to pry into us when we started kissing each other. However, I did not care how much the jealous moon knew about us because the man was mine and nobody else's.

At some phase of the trip, Dr. Mike parked the car and got down. Next, he made a little bonfire beside the path, tempting me to sit with him and drink another Johnnie Walker 12. Then, he got a hunk of goats' milk cheese and put it on a spit to roast it in the warmth of the flames with extreme care. My hunger that had already shown its need pleased itself and went back somewhere inside me, waiting for a next occasion. Finally, he picked up the guitar from the vehicle and serenaded me, singing the sweetest songs I could have listened that night.

At the right time, Dr. Mike pulled me towards his chest, giving me the impression that only he knew how to treat me like that, since no one else had ever taken me that way. Reclining against the Land Rover, he hugged me from behind, tangling up with my heart, and under such infatuation, my body surrendered without resistance as any half-priced stuff does. Then, he kissed my

neck and held my hair, caressing my whole body with the tender hands of a sweetheart. As if he were a pigeon in love, he mercilessly perched on me and cooed over my ears to take over what had once been untouched, upon leaning over my back to slip me such feeling of dominance. He elevated me up to my rebellious intimacy that was already succumbed, worn out and poured over those greenish Rwandese meadows.

When the pleasure came, I was on the line between body and spirit. Once being there, I could touch the moon and understand its meaning as its influence on me. The moon that had made me fall in love was coming down the slopes eager to turn me into the passionate turaco that my lover wanted to lock in a birdcage along the road back to Kigali. The whole space shrank, pressing us, one against the other, and the moon blocked the opening to the world above me. Under such claustrophobic submission, I realized how hot and stifling the love of a couple of caged birds is.