

BUT IF NOT...

"Hush, Athanase. Your belly's full now, eh? Time to sleep, little lion."

A dozen sleeping children lay huddled together against the church tower's far wall. Seraphine squinted through the window slits, hoping for a glimpse of Emmanuel among the men below.

There. She saw him standing in a pool of light, talking with a short, thick man. Mutura, Seraphine thought. Emmanuel should stay away from that evil-hearted jackal. What could they have to talk about? Puzzled, she leaned against the window wall, closed her eyes, and drifted away.

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Ragged, knocking engine sounds woke her. The pastor's Toyota pickup—still in need of a mechanic, she thought. And not likely to find one this day. Emmanuel was lying next to her, awake. He said quietly, "Ah. Pastor Kagenza has returned."

"Returned? Returned from where? Surely it isn't safe for him to leave the compound."

Emmanuel smiled. "Our nightmare will end today, Seraphine. Look and see."

Moving carefully to avoid waking the baby, Seraphine looked through the window slits. She did indeed see the familiar beige pickup approaching the walls, but it was at the head of a ragtag motorcade. A cold fist clenched around her gut.

"Emmanuel, those are vigilante patrols--*interhamwe!* Why is Pastor leading them here?" The children were stirring restlessly now, picking up the sound of fear in Seraphine's voice.

"Shh! Let these sleep. And mind Athanase." Emmanuel lifted her gently to her feet. "Come with me. We will talk downstairs."

As they descended the stairwell, Seraphine's voice rose in a terrified babble. "Emmanuel, what's happening? Pastor must have persuaded some of the vigilantes to protect us from the rest, right? Our Father does answer prayer, doesn't He, Emmanuel?"

He didn't reply. When they reached the ground floor, he put his hands on her shoulders. "Seraphine, we are not *inyenzi*--Tutsi cockroaches. If we cooperate with the avengers, we will be safe."

"Cooperate? Avengers? You talk foolishness, Emmanuel. The *interhamwe* kill our neighbors. They rape and torture our friends. What are they avenging? How can we cooperate with them?" Her voice was rising. The children upstairs begin to cry.

"Listen, Seraphine. Do you hear the grenades yet? The *interhamwe* will throw them onto the grounds. Do you hear the *inyenzi* dying yet? Why will you die with them?"

"*Inyenzi?* Emmanuel, your mother was Tutsi. Does that make you part cockroach? And is Athanase also--?"

Emmanuel shook her. "Hear me, you little fool! We will not die like vermin. We will not lose our limbs! Our neighbors will not violate you, they will not butcher Athanase. WE ARE NOT *INYENZI!*"

He flung open the supply closet door and pulled out a heavy tree limb hidden there. His eyes blazed as he hefted the makeshift club. "This is what we will do. Pastor and Mutara will lead the *interhamwe* to the *inyenzi* hiding in the hospital and the school. I will join them in the task of extermination. Mutara has agreed not to mention the children upstairs.

"As the *interhamwe* approach, you will bring Athanase down in your arms and instruct the rest to board the *interhamwe* trucks. This demonstrates your loyalty as a genuine Hutu. Do you understand?"

Seraphine backed away from him. "Emmanuel, have you gone mad? You can't do this! How can you love God and exterminate our neighbors?" She shook her head emphatically. "I won't lead these children to slaughter."

"They will be slaughtered regardless, Seraphine. God doesn't love cockroaches—don't you see that? You and Athanase MUST be spared."

"If you must use that weapon," Seraphine countered, "use it to protect us—not to exterminate. Please—let me get Athanase and the children; maybe we can slip out the back gate."

"Seraphine, you grasp at straws. The *interhamwe* surround the compound. The grenades have begun to fall. The time of Tutsis is past. True Hutus—like you and me, like Athanase—will attain the station in life we deserve!"

"Emmanuel, who are you? I don't know you! We are *Christian*. We are people of love. We are not avengers or exterminators or any such thing. We must flee!"

With his face flushed and his hand twitching on the tree limb, Emmanuel pushed her up the stairs. "You will do as I say, Seraphine! Bring the little cockroaches down and

lead them quietly to the trucks when the *interhamwe* reach the yard. You will not see them die, but you MUST lead them to the trucks! There is no other way!"

She jerked away from him and screamed, "No! Did you hear me?! I said no!!"

Emmanuel's eyes narrowed and he clamped his hand around her throat, lifting her off the step.

"I go now to protect you and Athanase, Seraphine. You *will* obey me. Your God of love is not concerned with this situation!"

He released her and ran out the door.

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Seraphine's eyes opened slowly. There was no sound. She tried to sit up, but there was no room. Pushing through the tangle of arms and legs... arms and legs? She screamed and clawed wildly to get out of the grisly pile where she was buried.

She reached fresh air and took a desperate breath. The twilight sky was beautiful—streaks of gold and bronze filtered the waning light of the sun. The *interhamwe* were gone.

"Athanase!" she screamed. Crying, she crawled over the stacked corpses, searching. Her hands, covered with blood, touched so many tiny bodies. So much blood.

Then she found Emmanuel. He lay on his side, legs tucked up, arms curled around his body. The tree limb was still clutched in his hand and partially covered by his torso. Seraphine screamed and collapsed next to him.

She cradled his head in her arms and wept, more quietly now. "You were right, Emmanuel," she sobbed. "God was not concerned. Where is He now?"

Athanase's answering wail came from the recessed area between the tree limb and the curve of Emmanuel's body.