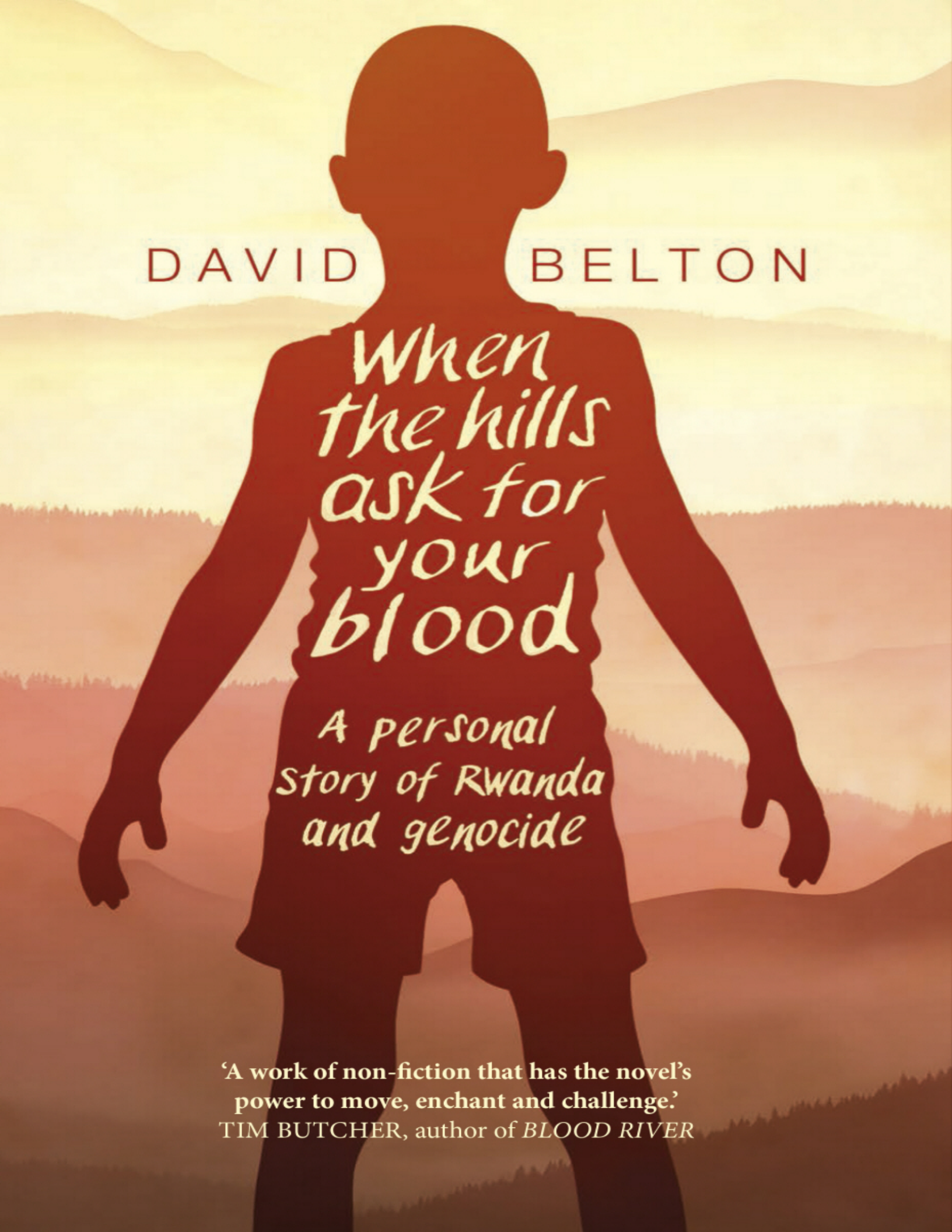




DAVID

BELTON

*When
the hills
ask for
your
blood*

*A personal
story of Rwanda
and genocide*

**'A work of non-fiction that has the novel's
power to move, enchant and challenge.'**
TIM BUTCHER, author of *BLOOD RIVER*

ABOUT THE BOOK

Into the heart of a genocide that left a million people dead.

6 April 1994: in the skies above Rwanda the President's plane is shot down in flames.

In the chapel of a hillside village, missionary priest **Vjeko Curic** prepares to save thousands.

Near Kigali, **Jean-Pierre** holds his family close, fearing for their lives.

The mass slaughter that follows – friends against friends, neighbours against neighbours – is one of the bloodiest chapters in history.

Twenty years on, BBC *Newsnight* producer David Belton, one of the first journalists into Rwanda, tells of the horrors he experienced at first-hand. Following the threads of Jean-Pierre and Vjeko Curic's stories, he revisits a country still marked with blood, in search of those who survived and the legacy of those who did not. This is David Belton's personal quest for the limits of bravery and forgiveness.

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When the Hills Ask for Your Blood

A Personal Story of Genocide and Rwanda

David Belton

For Jules



AUTHOR'S NOTE

On 6 April 1994 Rwanda's president, Juvénal Habyarimana, was assassinated. Within hours violence had erupted in the capital, Kigali. Soldiers of the Hutu government sought out and executed political opponents of the regime: hundreds of liberal voices from inside Rwanda were targeted and killed – from both the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi ethnic groups.

In response, the Tutsi-dominated rebel army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), invaded the country from its bases in Uganda. As the RPF headed south, the Hutu government ordered its army, police and civilian militias to begin a sustained and pre-planned campaign to murder all Rwandan Tutsis. The killings were heavily propagandized. Urged on by their government, thousands of ordinary Hutus participated in the mass slaughter.

Within days, tens of thousands of Tutsis had been killed. On 19 April, Human Rights Watch contacted the United Nations to advise them that the killings amounted to genocide of the Tutsi people. But on 21 April, the UN Security Council voted to withdraw more than two thousand of its troops from Rwanda, leaving a staff of just 270. By late April, the International Committee of the Red Cross estimated that 250,000 Tutsis had been murdered.

On 2 May 1994 I was sent to Rwanda by the BBC's *Newsnight* programme, to cover the crisis. By then I knew a little of the recent political history of the country.

- ◆ Rwanda is comprised of three ethnic groups – the majority Hutu (around 85 per cent of the population), and

the minority Tutsi (14 per cent) and Twa (1 per cent).

- ◆ Rwandans share the same language and religions but, historically, many Tutsis were pastoralists, cattle-herders, whereas many Hutus settled on the land, growing crops.
- ◆ In the pre-colonial era Rwanda was ruled by a Tutsi monarchy and Tutsis were the elite. But ethnicity was a fluid concept. Hutus loyal to the Tutsi court could be rewarded with cattle, and if the herd were large enough, would become Tutsi. Intermarriage between the two largest ethnic groups was common.
- ◆ In 1919 Rwanda became a Belgian colony. The new colonialists favoured the Tutsis and further entrenched their position in Rwanda with greater economic and political privilege. This was reinforced fourteen years later with the introduction of identity cards, which labelled each Rwandan's ethnicity – Hutu, Tutsi or Twa.
- ◆ In 1959 a popular revolution by the majority Hutus against the Tutsi rulers provoked Belgium to abandon their colony three years later. Thousands of Tutsis fled the country and more followed when, in 1962, a Hutu government was elected.
- ◆ Throughout the 1960s and 1970s there were periodic massacres of Tutsis by forces of the Hutu-led government of, first, Grégoire Kayibanda and, following a coup in 1973, Major Juvénal Habyarimana.
- ◆ In 1990 a military force of exiled Tutsis, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), launched a series of attacks into northern Rwanda from its bases in Uganda. The RPF largely consisted of Tutsi exiles from the pogroms of the late 1950s and 1960s.

- ◆ Between 1990 and 1993 the war escalated. The RPF encountered fierce resistance from the Rwandan army, which received military support from France. Inside the country, violence against Tutsis increased, as did the level of state-sponsored anti-Tutsi propaganda by Hutu extremists, many of whom held senior positions in government.
- ◆ In 1993, international pressure to end the conflict forced both sides into peace talks. Over the vociferous objections of Hutu extremist politicians, President Habyarimana signed the Arusha Accords, which set out a power-sharing agreement that would usher in a new transitional government that incorporated the RPF.
- ◆ In October 1993, a UN peace-monitoring force, UNAMIR, comprising of two and a half thousand soldiers, was sent to Rwanda to help prepare the country for its political transition.
- ◆ On the night of 6 April 1994, President Habyarimana was returning from negotiations in Tanzania when his plane was shot down.

It was during the first of two assignments into Rwanda to report on the genocide that I met Vjeko Curic and stayed at his friary in Kivumu. It was not until 2003, however, when I returned to Rwanda in preparation for a feature film that I was producing, that I met with Jean-Pierre and Odette Sagahutu. Over the next ten years, I returned to Rwanda on several occasions and began to write the story of Jean-Pierre, Odette and Vjeko.

INTRODUCTION

I am staying at the Christus Centre, which sits enclosed behind a tall brick wall and a curl of razor wire, close to the heart of the city. The rooms have single metal beds and small windows, like cells. The heat in the afternoon is draining. The small courtyard looks bleached as if the sun has sucked the colour out of the pale brickwork. The sky is white - white-hot - and there is no join between earth and sky. The rooms are a good place to hide.

The Centre was home to Jesuit priests but now they are all dead. They were herded into the room next to where I sleep and gunned down. That was two months ago and there are still brown smears of blood on the walls. From the small window at the back of my room I can see the garden which is wild and overgrown. A rose, puce with colour, has wound its way up an avocado tree. The bush grows fast here. Especially in April when dense, grey curtains of rain sweep across the city and the streets and gardens are full of the sounds of metal pangas hacking away - *swish swish swish* - at the undergrowth. Another journalist who is staying here said he stumbled across a dead body when he walked through the garden late one evening. I don't believe him. You would smell the body long before you came across it. But it is true that you can find bodies anywhere. At the nearby hospital I watched quicklime being thrown over a pit of tangled corpses that had been discovered under a patch of shrubbery behind the canteen, weeks after they had been murdered. Anyway, the bush grows fast and you need to cut it back - a little every day - just to keep it under control.

The last remnants of the defeated army left the city a few days ago. The soldiers had bayed like dogs, punching the air and screaming that they would be back. The city teeters, as if it is catching its breath – not yet daring to believe that the criminals have left and that the people who remain are safe to emerge from under their rusted corrugated roofs. We Westerners hare around like anarchists, oblivious to traffic signals, looking for people. There are only a few. They stand awkwardly by their doorways and seem uncomfortable talking about what has just happened. ‘We are alive,’ they say.

The market at Nyabugogo opens but there is little food. A few women walk through the afternoon haze, in their broken plastic shoes, along concrete pavements that rot and collapse into steaming open gutters. They shake their heads at slowing taxis whose exhausts burp goutts of diesel at the lorries that have started to return to the city and which are sprawled at the side of the road, cabins cranked forward, broken-necked, their engines’ entrails picked over by yawning drivers. Building begins. Small boys with bright, quick eyes and manly hands heave buckets of concrete porridge up through precarious wooden scaffolding, shield their eyes and gaze down at the convoys of white jeeps full of *awuzungu* – the white men – in pressed cotton shirts who browse through sheaves of paper and rehearse their opening remarks to the new Minister. Repugnance at the crime, condolence to the victims, hope for the survivors.

Ten years pass.

When I return there is nothing, outwardly, that I can see that points to what had taken place a decade earlier. Apart from the Parliament, that is, with its mustard walls still peppered with gaping, man-sized shell holes. I’m told that the President has no current plans to repair the building,

preferring to keep it as a symbol of the war his rebel army fought to defeat the government and rescue the country. He likes to drive visiting politicians past the building too – an unspoken dig into the flabby ribcage of Western guilt. Now, that I do believe.

Otherwise, it is hard to imagine that in 1994 blood soaked the streets of this curvaceous, luminescent city. Even the city's genocide memorial seems to have actively divorced itself from the past; its spick-and-span white paint and smart grey roof tiles make it more Virginia Water golf club than place of remembrance. But what I begin to understand is that to imagine that Kigali, or anywhere in Rwanda, or any Rwandan, for that matter, carries the familiar, well-thumbed signs of genocide – that indelible visual shorthand that proclaims 'crimes against humanity' – is to misunderstand what happened here. There were no ghettos, no tattooed numbers on wrists, no propaganda showing trains shuttling the victims off to a 'new' homeland – a cold death in a concrete and steel tank in a dark Polish wood. There were no epic forced marches from cities and towns to the privacy of a rice paddy. No grinning monster surrounded by his flunkies. No satellite images of mass graves exist – no satellite bothered to swing by. Isolated, unimportant, African. The West cared not one jot for this impoverished thumbnail of land, except as somewhere to escape from as quickly as possible. Aid workers, diplomats, peacekeepers, doctors, missionaries – the ubiquitous mob of transient helpers that descends on a sub-Saharan, aid-dependent, autocratic, dysfunctional state – were hauled on to waiting aircraft by burly European soldiers the moment trouble broke out. Within two weeks, all but a couple of hundred from the force of two and a half thousand mechanized and heavily armed UN soldiers who had been in the country since the previous summer had left, too.

Rwandans were killed quickly, Tutsis mostly; but Hutus too – those the state mistrusted. A sophisticated, expertly

communicated, highly propagandized campaign to racially and politically purify the country. Eight hundred thousand murdered – not in the one hundred days speechmakers favour, but more like fifty. Eight hundred thousand dead, in less than half a school semester. Maybe closer to a million (people argue over the number but it's an exhausting, airless argument). There was no need for death camps – the killers lived next door to their victims. The extremists called themselves the interim government and told people that what they were doing wasn't murder but communal work. Or sometimes, more grandly, they called it *national duty*. But it was murder and it happened everywhere and involved everyone. Across Rwanda, one Monday in early April, a farmer compared his bean harvest with his neighbour's, schoolteachers moaned together over cuts in funding, midwives organized their monthly rotas. Then a few days later ordinary Rwandans, civilians, rose up, in a murderous spasm, against people they worked with, drank with, had married. Occasionally they got their hands on guns or grenades but usually the killing was conducted with machetes, knives, hammers, clubs and, if they were desperate or maybe just imaginative, wrenched-off bicycle handlebars. In hospitals, nurses were hacked to death on the wards where they worked, new mothers slaughtered in their beds, their babies smashed against the walls. In schools, children were murdered and stuffed down latrines; in villages, storekeepers rounded up and thrown alive down wells. In churches, gangs with machetes and clubs tore into the thousands that had sought sanctuary there. Across the valleys and fields and marshes of Rwanda, no Tutsi was safe. The contamination of unhinged violence – and of ungraspable guilt – runs through every city street, every district, every hillside village.

The scars of this genocide are not found in slaughterhouses – though there are plenty of those – but embedded, like a migraine, in the crenulated bone of the

inside of the minds of all those who survived, who took part, or just gawped as blunt metal edges rained down on brittle, bowed, heads. In the minds of those who endured and who, now, have no choice but to live alongside each other. In the mind of the woman who walks, unblinking, to the market every day, past the butcher's stall where a man stands with bloodied apron and watches her; the same man who ended her husband's life on a wet April afternoon in 1994; a man who was the envy of the village because his blade was never blunt, he never broke sweat, and when the day ended he still had the energy to lift a bottle of beer to his lips.

In his peach-coloured office, I sit and talk to President Kagame. He has presided over Rwanda's slow recovery since the forces he commanded defeated the Hutu extremists in the summer of 1994. In a cabinet behind him are several books on business management and a biography of Lee Kuan Yew. Kagame's long, elegant hands drape themselves over his crossed knee, his tapered fingers clasped delicately together. He talks about his plans for the future. Rwanda will be the nexus between east and west Africa. Kigali will become a hi-tech business centre built and run by an educated, urbanized population. Its smallness, Kagame says, helps with his analogy that Rwanda will become the African equivalent of Singapore. His thin frame seems to wallow about in his blue suit as he talks. His shirt collar is too big for his thin neck. I want to reach over and cinch the knot of his tie more tightly.

This talk of IT and invisible exports is tiring. I ask him how his vision can be reconciled with life, as it is currently lived, on the streets of Kigali, where the surviving victims of the genocide live next to the killers. Kagame shifts in his oversprung, gilded chair. There is a faint air of exasperation in his thin, fluttery voice. Not this again, he seems to be thinking.

‘You are wrong. We are all victims here. Not just the survivors. The killers, too.’

He tells me that Rwanda was the victim of an appalling crime perpetrated by extremists and racists. But it is time to move on. ‘Not to forget, of course. But we are one nation now. No more Tutsis or Hutus. Just Rwandans.’ The President pauses. I think about Jean-Pierre. We have been working together for a few months now, on a film that is being made in Kigali. We have become friends. He dropped me off at the President’s compound earlier but he will be home by now. Sitting on his steps, talking into his phone. Smart grey steps – polished and perpendicular – he poured the cement himself when he built the new house on the foundations of where his old house had stood. Not many Tutsis survived the slaughter in his district of the city. The houses were so densely packed some said the killers stood at night with their ears pressed against the walls, waiting for the *inyenzi* – the ‘cockroaches’ – to give themselves away. Jean-Pierre survived. For two months and sixteen days, he hid and they never found him. When the killers left, he went home and there was nothing left of his house. Not a brick, a door lintel, a window frame, an electrical wire, a scrap of carpet, a flake of paint. Jean-Pierre likes to tell me that they didn’t just want him dead; they wanted to wipe out any evidence that he had ever existed.

‘Is it possible,’ I ask the President, ‘for Rwanda to outpace its ethnic past?’ Kagame looks away, out on to the compound – a neatly trimmed lawn bisected by a meandering crazy-paved path of blood-red bricks. Soldiers stand guard at the small doorway at the edge of the compound. They are huge men, bedecked with oiled weaponry. I’d been told that they come from Tanzania, specially trained, unequivocally loyal. Kagame sits back in his chair. ‘We have to,’ he says. There is a long pause. The two presidential aides sit motionless, watching him, like

cats staring up at a tree where a bird flutters in the branches. When he next speaks, his voice is whispery quiet. 'We have to,' he says. 'We have no choice.'

PART I

1994

'I cannot but remember such things were,
That were most precious to me. Did Heaven look on,
And would not take their part?'

Macbeth, Act IV, Scene iii

CHAPTER ONE

Jean-Pierre

The hole was fifteen foot deep. Deeper, Jean-Pierre reckoned, than most septic tanks in Nyamirambo. Deep and dark enough for anyone who could be bothered to heave off the metal cover checking for Tutsis to think him dead and surely not worth the effort of finding a rope and going down to check. They could always fire a few shots into his prone body but how many people in this part of town had weapons or enough ammunition to waste on a shapeless, grey shadow. There had been few bursts of gunfire accompanying the screams that Jean-Pierre had heard from down here in his hole. Machetes or clubs, he suspected, had done the job. Anyway, there was nothing he could do about the guns. All he knew was that cesspits in this part of Kigali were often only eight or ten foot deep. So he was lucky.

The district of Nyamirambo lay at the southern edge of Kigali and had been home to Jean-Pierre for the past month. Densely packed, undistinguished, it sat mostly on the flattish ridge of a hill staring at a dull, blunt peak called Mount Kigali, attracting only the poor or the cultural outcasts – Muslims, musicians, cross-dressers, drug addicts. There were few here who could afford the extra work to dig a cesspit into the soft red soil deep enough to keep the stench away. And little point if the houses either side were less civic-minded.

The deep holes were dug in Kacyiru or Kiyovu, for the ministers and their lackeys who roosted like cockerels in their oversized villas, oblivious to their privileged views of the valleys that unfolded for miles and, under a full moon, glowed like alabaster; their families lounged on imported tan leather sofas, wilting under the weight of their ennui, sucking on orange Fantas, ignoring the grunts of the man of the house as he screwed the new Tutsi maid against the bathroom door upstairs.

The walls of the hole were reddish-brown and had been dug with care and attention – smooth to Jean-Pierre’s touch. His fingers travelled across their surface. Gentle undulations, patches of roughened soil that bumped his fingers as they ran along the sides; some wetness too – though he was sure that the foot of water at the bottom of the hole was from rainfall rather than from any pipe. He liked to touch these walls. In the darkness his hand could span an area that was quite different in texture and feel to any other part, as if each had its own story. Intricate personal crevices that earthed him to the world beyond his hole. The echoed shouts of life outside spiralled downwards to where he sat, staring in the darkness at his walls, rubbing grains of dirt between his thumb and forefinger, kneading the earth into his skin. Each circumference the tip of his thumb drew around the print of his forefinger triggered a mild trembling down the left side of his body, proof – as if he needed it – that he could still respond to the delicacies of touch. Each circumference felt like his personal mini planetary orbit. A rotation in time. And (and this was important to him) another second off the time left in his hole.

Jean-Pierre had chosen well to climb into that particular cesspit on the morning of 11 April. In fact, for the whole of the previous two months, his decision-making had, he reckoned, been nigh on impeccable. By February his home in Gatenga, like many other districts in Kigali, had become

tense. The peace process had stumbled, lurching between moments of optimism when liberal politicians proclaimed that a power-sharing deal between the Hutu government of Juvénal Habyarimana and the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front was close at hand, to despairing darkness as the same politicians were set upon, beaten up or murdered by Hutu extremists. News of each latest wave of violence swept into the squeezed mass of small brick houses in Gatenga, which stewed with gossip. Jean-Pierre's home was wedged between two larger houses and only when he retreated to the cramped bathroom where, under a trickle of water from the ancient showerhead, he washed each morning could he escape the flow of chatter from his Hutu neighbours as they argued over the latest Tutsi 'plot' to destabilize the government. Really, it was Odette who suffered most; it was she who had to walk past the gangs of young Hutu boys, not yet confident enough to shout at her but old enough to curl their lips and scratch their testicles, snorting at her as she made her way to the bus stop and her job at the state electricity company. With no regular hours, Jean-Pierre could stay at home instead to look after Sandra, now two, and their nine-month-old, Vanessa.

By early March, Jean-Pierre decided that Gatenga was too enflamed by the political turmoil for Tutsi families. Odette and the girls should leave Kigali and, for the time being, live with her parents, Bernard and Joséphine, in Gitarama – little more than thirty miles south-west of the capital. He told them not to worry. He would remain in Kigali but move to another district, Nyamirambo, where most of his clients had their businesses. He promised he would come and stay with them the following weekend.

Unlike Gatenga, Nyamirambo was a cacophonous mix of Tutsi and Hutu, Muslim and Christian, sweat shops and street stalls, the city's poor and downtrodden who, after years of exclusion, were now largely unbothered by the racist blasts from the government radio station. It was also

home to Jean-Pierre's best friend from his student days in Zaire. Ernest lived in a small side street in the heart of Nyamirambo with his new wife and baby daughter. Jean-Pierre felt safer here, closer to the city limits if he needed to get away to Gitarama, and better placed to assess the mood of the capital.

For a month Jean-Pierre continued his daily routine. Several businesses in the district needed an accountant to manage their books. The money was not much but after the government department had got rid of him, the work kept his accounting skills up to scratch and it left him time to manage the two music stalls he had opened on a street close to Avenue de la Justice. Twice a week he handed boxes of tapes he had had shipped from Zaire to two boys who ran the stalls. A good day would see his mix of funk, reggae and Zairean Afrobeat earn him five thousand francs – thirty dollars – and sometimes double that. The weekends with his family in Gitarama were short and leaving Odette and the children again was difficult. But he felt sure that the uncertainties of the previous few weeks would come to an end soon; the President was close to signing a peace deal and that, enforced by a UN presence in Kigali, would surely put an end to the recent violence.

Jean-Pierre listened to the announcement on the state radio station, Radio Rwanda, on the morning of 7 April. The President had been assassinated. A long time later, people would relish telling Jean-Pierre how they had heard the President's plane crash: the scream of engines as the Falcon F-1 struggled to stay airborne after the surface to air missile slammed into its port engine, the magnificent, swollen boom that thundered around the hills as it ploughed – with its own rather unique homing instinct – deep into the President's own vegetable patch in his back garden. But Jean-Pierre heard none of this and suspected people who claimed that they had simply liked to pretend they had witnessed Habyarimana's demise in this way. The

radio that morning told people to remain calm. A transitional government was already in place. But the crackles of gunfire that Jean-Pierre could make out from other districts suggested reprisals had already begun. It prompted both he and Ernest to keep inside the house and out of sight from any neighbours or passersby. Ernest's wife, Anny, and their baby were told to stay in the bedroom at the back of the house. Initially, the shooting sounded distant, and they whispered to themselves that it must be from the wealthier districts of Kigali where all those deemed by the ruling Hutu elite to be untrustworthy or subversive were likely to have been put on extermination lists, just as they had been in earlier massacres in the 1970s and 1980s.

Nyamirambo, they thought, held little value for the Hutu government. The poor and the marginalized had never been a priority for the military or the politicians. Yet, by late morning, there was a knock at the gate of Ernest's house. A gendarme stood there. A few locals loitered behind him, some peering over his shoulder, craning to see past Ernest into the small rectangular compound. Who was he, the gendarme demanded. Ernest Balola. From the Republic of Zaire. The gendarme asked if he was harbouring any Tutsis. No, Ernest said, he wasn't. The small crowd shifted, a few murmurs, but the gendarme was satisfied and walked off. The civilians followed obediently but some heads were still turned, watching as Ernest, his shoulder bent into the gate, slid across the metal latch.

Crouched at the back of the house Jean-Pierre could hear the shouts of the crowd on the street. There was excitement in their voices but also a kind of frenzy. He spent the day moving from room to room – somewhat embarrassed by his boyish commando crawling – below window height, trying to assess how close the killers were. The house had an inner courtyard and from the privy situated in the corner of it, Jean-Pierre could look out on to

the main street. There were gangs of men being directed by the shouts of a local *conseiller*, who led them through the warren of small streets as they conducted house-to-house searches. Towards evening there was a deafening crash – a gunshot, not far away. Ernest poked his head out on to the street. A man called Jean-Marie – quite old, a resident of the district for many years – had been shot at the top of the lane, someone said, by the wall that bordered the Republican Guard barracks. Inside, Jean-Pierre listened. He had known Jean-Marie. The old man was surely nothing to them – nobody important.

The shooting intensified, echoing around the hills that dissected the city. Ernest whispered to his friend and together they crept across the courtyard to their spyhole in the privy. From the little window Jean-Pierre could see a small truck. Machetes, clubs – a few rifles – were being unloaded from the back and the *conseiller* was handing them out. They heard more shouts. There didn't seem to be any method to where the men went or whose houses were searched, merely a response to a series of urgent barks by a gang leader acting on snippets of information that he received. The murder of the old man whirled around Jean-Pierre's head. It was pointless – there was no sense to it. And now all these weapons being handed out. Jean-Pierre began to suspect that what was taking place was not an isolated massacre like those when he was a small boy or even targeted killings but something more malevolent.

At dusk they ate. Bowls of beans and, over the brazier, they cooked maize. Jean-Pierre watched the rich plume of smoke spiral up from the compound and disappear into the darkening sky. Perhaps the uneasy hush that had fallen over Nyamirambo had unnerved him but the smoke felt like a signal to the killers outside, roaming the streets. He thought about Odette and the children. It was possible that the waves of anger and paranoia that echoed around the walls of the small compound in which he sat would

dissipate and not produce the same intensity of violence elsewhere in the country. Then again, Jean-Pierre reasoned, he could be entirely wrong. Perhaps this frenzy that he detected meant all of Rwanda was now in flames and every Tutsi had become a target. He wondered if Odette had had any choice in what course of action to take. If she had, he felt sure that she would have chosen well.

Years earlier he had watched her as she walked past his office on the lakeshore road in Kibuye each morning and evening. Hardly a road – more a series of ruts in the hard red earth that children used as tram lines to run their wooden carts along. When he was small he'd had a similar cart. A cart that became a sailboat when the rains in April turned the road to soup. The ruts brimmed with rainwater then. He and his brothers used to watch the contorted faces of drivers staring wide-eyed through their windscreen wipers, ship captains suddenly ploughing into deep, gloopy brown seas. The dry season brought dust – thick, smutty clouds that lined the inside of Jean-Pierre's mouth and stained his old T-shirt with red smears of snot. Government cars rarely ventured on to the roads that Jean-Pierre played on so there was little chance of having their surface metalled. The Chinese road crews that criss-crossed their way through Rwanda in the seventies and eighties – dropping like flies with malaria and tuberculosis and later, as they whored, AIDS – paved only the roads used by President Habyarimana and his cronies.

Somehow, on her journey to work, Odette never tripped or stumbled as she walked past Jean-Pierre's office. Her step was light and never rushed. Her head sat precisely on her slender neck, like a pea perched on a plastic straw. When her body moved and swayed as she negotiated the next obstacle, her head stayed perfectly still, balancing an invisible pot. He liked her calmness and the way she ignored men's leering stares. He loved her courage and he wanted to protect her. When she walked behind the

umurehe tree outside his office, with its grey trunk and long leaves, he had to crane his neck through the window to catch sight of her. Images slid into his mind: her hand carrying her briefcase, low-heeled shoes picking their way carefully through the ruts, her shapely bottom in a dark skirt, her dead-ahead look – before she was gone, up the hill to her office and Jean-Pierre was left wondering how he would ever find a way to talk to her.

On the morning of 8 April 1994, Ernest left his house and walked to the crossroads twenty-five yards down the road. At the junction was a yellow-painted office. Pinned to the door was a list of names. When Ernest came back to the house he reported that Jean-Pierre's name was on the list. They spent the day discussing his options. Ernest and his wife were Zairean so they and their baby were in no danger. But Jean-Pierre worried that they were risking their lives by having him in their home. Ernest disagreed. Nobody had spotted Jean-Pierre recently at the house and if anyone asked he would say that his friend had gone with his family to Gitarama.

At five o'clock that afternoon it began to rain. A steady rain, powerful enough to send the gangs back to their homes. The neighbourhood grew quiet. Crouched, his back against a wall, sitting below the window, Jean-Pierre listened to the battering on the corrugated roof. It lasted nearly an hour – about right for April – beating out its pattern above him. Then, like the last swish of gravel being swept off a concrete path, the rain moved on. He did not dare look out but he knew what he would see if he did – that mesmerizing clarity of the sky, a cold, hard blue, washed clean of its mugginess, the soaked streets shining angrily, smouldering with the last moments of evening light. He could hear drips landing in the water buckets outside – innocent plops that he sometimes used to imitate in front of Sandra to make her laugh as she scribbled nonsense on the dirt by the back door. The rain had lasted

just long enough. Judging by last night, the gangs of killers would not begin their hunt again until the following morning.

Curic

Thirty miles south-west of Kigali, up a narrow bumpy track off the main Gitarama road, lies the parish church of Kivumu. Adjoining the church is a series of small, single-storey buildings, joined together and set, on three sides, around a patch of neatly mown grass. On 7 April 1994, the pastor of Kivumu, Vjeko Curic, was on the telephone, talking to his old friend, Father Sebastijan Markovic; they were discussing the assassination. Markovic had been unable to get back to his friary in Kigali after giving a Mass out of town the previous day. But at least that meant he was able to speak with Curic now. The telephone lines had been cut in the capital but here, out in the country, the lines still worked. Curic explained that he had seen little out of the ordinary in and around Kivumu, but he admitted that he had not ventured far that day so it was difficult to make a proper assessment. Despite the poor quality of the line, he could hear Markovic's heavy breathing. His friend was stressed. He was cut off from the other Salesian Fathers, holed up in a relatively unknown backwater and unsure how the events of the last twenty-four hours would unfold. Curic advised Markovic to leave early for Kigali the following morning and to be ready to bribe the soldiers at any military roadblocks he might run into. It was impossible to say for sure what would happen next but certainly he, like Markovic, feared for the country and worried that his Tutsi parishioners could become targets for Hutus bent on violent revenge.

Later that evening Curic took prayers in the small chapel just off the sitting room. The ancient generator surged like

an old man clearing his throat, causing the chapel lights to flicker.

‘O Lord, I cried to you for help and you have healed me. I will thank you for ever.’

Curic, his brown habit worn with age, tried to concentrate on the prayers but all he could think about was the vow he had made to his old friend before he put down the telephone: ‘You know this, Sebastijan. You know I will be staying – whatever happens.’

There was nothing surprising about what Curic told him – the moment of decision for the two priests had been building for some time. But the words that crackled down the line seemed to press against the side of Markovic’s temples – thick, like a pulse inside his head.

Before the assassination of President Habyarimana, Sebastijan Markovic coaxed his old Toyota saloon up the bumpy track to Kivumu most weeks to visit Curic, his closest friend. Markovic enjoyed the respite from Kigali; it was quieter here, there was none of the political intrigue that dominated the nightly conversations that he endured in the capital with two of his fellow priests. Both Belgian, and much older than Sebastijan, Father Pierre and Father Matthieu irritated the hell out of him. Matthieu, in particular, was an infuriating gossip, sniffing out information with the suppressed eagerness of a teenage radio ham twiddling his dials long after bedtime, falling upon snippets of news with unreserved delight, concocting half-baked theories about which he would pontificate over dinner.

Markovic and Curic were both Bosnian, both in their late thirties and both had worked in Rwanda for many years. As men who had grown up in Yugoslavia, surrounded by Orthodox Serbs, Muslim Bosnians and Catholic Croatians, they were attuned to the often unspoken but deeply felt grievances of ethnic division. Spending time with Curic was

always a relief for Markovic after days in the company of his Salesian brothers who, he felt, spent too much of the day gossiping and politicking and not enough ministering to their parishioners. But recently, he had been coming to Kivumu for reassurance. Kigali had begun to frighten him. It wasn't just politicians who were being attacked. His own parishioners had started to turn up at the parish house fearing for their lives and asking for protection. Tutsis harassed and intimidated by their Hutu neighbours. In February another member of the order, Father Jean-Paul, a French Canadian, had had a service interrupted by the arrival of a gang of young men dressed in the uniform of the militia, known as the *interahamwe* and notorious for being the blunt end of state-sponsored violence. Jean-Paul had protested, calling them 'hypocrites' for wearing rosaries when they were known to be killers. He was lucky, Markovic reckoned, not to have been attacked on the spot. Kigali was simmering with a mixture of fear and anger from the overwhelmingly Hutu population: anger that the internationally brokered power-sharing deal between the Hutu government and the Tutsi rebels risked a return to the colonial days of Tutsi rule; fear that thirty years of Hutu oppression of the minority Tutsis would lead to horrific reprisals should they lose power. The city felt like a clenched fist, itching to lash out. On Markovic's last visit to his friend, he had sat hunched forward in his chair, hands clasped together, and poured out his worries. His contemplative, slightly preachy manner was gone. His thinning hair was plastered with sweat, his short-sleeved shirt clung damply to his body. The calm authority that Curic so admired and which typified the intellectualism of the Salesians had drained from his friend's voice. Curic loved Sebastijan, but whilst he enjoyed his visits to the École Technique Officielle in Kigali, the Fathers' secondary school where Markovic lived and worked, he had never had much time for his Belgian colleagues – pudgy, complacent,

old-school Europeans, who basked in their former role as know-it-all colonialists. He was sure, too, that some of the Belgian Fathers were politically suspect. They were Flemish men – part of the Dutch-speaking majority in Belgium who had, historically, been ignored by the minority Walloons who resolutely had kept the country Francophone – and who, in his analysis, naturally sided with the Hutus, another oppressed majority whom independence had ushered into power. Curic suspected it ran even deeper. The Belgians, he knew, felt inferior to – even intimidated by – the Tutsis who they knew they couldn't manipulate. 'I can tell a Hutu that it's a nice day and whatever the weather he will nod in agreement,' one priest had told Curic when he first arrived in Rwanda. 'But don't ask a Tutsi,' the man continued. 'He'll look at the sky and if he disagrees he'll tell you.'

'What do *you* want to do?' Curic had asked Markovic that evening.

It was a question that had whirled around Sebastijan Markovic's head for several weeks. But now, at last, he knew the answer and saying it to Curic felt like a release. 'I want to leave. I mean, if something bad happens, I will leave. In all probability, I think anyone who stays is in very grave danger.'

The room in which they sat had grown quiet. Curic could hear another colleague talking to the Hutu cook, Oswald, in the kitchen. Dusk was approaching and the grey light had softened the bright sheen of the polished-cement floor and dropped both men into contemplative shadow. Out here in the country Curic had witnessed little of the intimidation and violence that Markovic had experienced in the capital. He suspected that Kivumu's wide valleys and the remoteness of its hillside villages helped dilute the intrigue and tension. But he didn't doubt his friend's analysis. Recently he had watched groups of young Hutu men gather in villages – private conclaves to which he was not invited

nor welcome. Curic had become deeply immersed in Rwandan life. He spoke Kinyarwanda like a local – not the arcane, eye-watering textbook version but the sweat-stained language found in the fields and markets. Here, from the silences between words, the hesitations and pauses, the syllables dying on lips and the downcast eyes, Curic learned to interpret true feelings. The prejudice that Tutsis endured but which they were careful to leave unspoken; the boredom of the jobless young Hutus who hung around the market stalls; the numbing frustration of the farmers who squatted by their huts most afternoons, drawing deep on their straws dipped into bottles of fetid banana beer. The gatherings had left him uneasy.

It was a while before Curic spoke. Then he said, ‘Sis, there comes a time when you have to make a choice – either to stay or go. You cannot escape reality all the time.’

Markovic was unsurprised by Curic’s barbed reply. He was aware of his friend’s irritation with the easy life embraced by the priestly enclaves that had prospered ever since Rwanda had been first colonized. The country offered missionaries an existence of unchallengeable isolation, tucked away comfortably in the folds of Rwanda’s hills, careful to keep the poor to whom they ministered at arm’s length. For decades they had pootled along the potholed roads in their old Peugeots and Toyotas to hold Masses, tend to the sick and dying, visit schools. In the evenings they returned to their friary houses where Rwandans mutely struggled in the kitchens to produce a passable version of European cuisine. There was usually electricity and, if not, Rome would find funds for a powerful generator, to offer the Fathers light for their evening prayers and bedtime reading. It was a quiet life – uncomplicated by the startling modernity they saw on their occasional visits to Europe, which sent them scuttling back to the stolid communal rhythms they beat out daily in their Rwandan parishes.