

# In My Father's House There Are Many Murders

*by* Kenneth Weene

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My poor country! My poor, rich country! You suffer so; and we your people, how much worse is it for us? Now I wait with you. I wait for my dying. I practice this my story that I might tell it to the spirits. I shall rehearse it until I have entered their world.

It has not always been so. Before the Europeans, before their greed for the things of the land — then we lived in peace. Tribe did not fight tribe. Family did not fight family. There was enough for all. There was enough grain. There was enough cattle. There were enough fruits and nuts. There were enough wild animals of the hunt. There was enough beer to drink. There was enough rain, and there was enough sun. It was, I think, a bigger place — a place for all.

If a man should want another's goat or his woman, there was law. The chiefs made sacred words, and they were obeyed. Even the young men full of blood listened to the chiefs. The law was obeyed and there was goodness among the people.

Then the Europeans came. They came in their great boats. They came with guns and chains. They took our people as slaves, and they took our land. The Europeans made the land as a slave to them, a slave to grow cotton and coffee and other things that the land did not know. And, in their taking, they made our land small.

Still, this was not enough for these foreigners. Deep in the earth they found stones, stones which belonged to the land. They did not care that the stones belonged to the land any more than they cared that the land was not theirs or that the people whom they took as slaves came from the tribes of the land.

They took stones that glistened in the sun. They took the yellow rock called gold and the white ones they called diamonds. They took the red stone and the green. They took the earth that they claimed gave energy, that which they called uranium. They stole the stones of the land, and they made the people of the land dig the earth for them.

Yet, they still were not happy. They wanted to take the blood of the earth. They called this blood oil. Like the slaves who had gone before, they put the blood of the earth on great ships and took it to their own lands.

Then Tututua appeared among us. He fought the Europeans. He took their guns and their knives and hid them among the people. When there were enough weapons, he led the warriors of the tribes into battle. They drove the Europeans from our land. Tututua became the great chief among us, and we were happy again. The land, too, was again happy. The happiness could be heard in the wind and felt in the sun. The happiness could be tasted in the good food.

One day, when he was flying among the clouds, Tututua was shot by Europeans who had been hiding in the jungles. There was a great

crash, and his silver bird fell to the earth and burned a circle in the jungle. We were without a chief, and the people did not know what to do.

There appeared a man who was not known among the tribes. He had left the land many years before and gone to live among the Europeans. The people did not know that he was a friend of the men who had killed Tututua. He had much wealth, which the Europeans had given him. He offered the wealth to young men, men full of blood, men who would follow him to more wealth.

These men went into the jungle with their new leader. They did not know him, but they knew the fine things that he could give them. They knew clothes and guns. They knew medicines and machines that could uproot the largest trees. They knew foods from far away and things on which to ride instead of walking. They knew the liquor of the Europeans — the liquor which made them feel happiness and power. Oh, he offered them great wealth so that they became greedy.

When there was enough greed among them, this leader set them to war against our people. He promised them that they would sell the stones of the land and the blood of the earth to the Europeans and become men of great wealth. The young men who had learned greed followed him. They made war on their own people.

Some of our people ran away and hid in the jungles they did not know. I was one of those. In great fear and with little hope, I was one of those who left his home and hid.

Others were taken captive and set to work — once again our people were forced to steal from the land for the Europeans. Great was their labor. Great, too, was their unhappiness.

And, great was our unhappiness hiding in the jungles that we did not know.

Among us, among the people who had run away from men's greed, who had run and hid under the canopy of tree and sky, a leader appeared. He was called Alalmah, but many said that he was Tututua, who had returned to us, who had come again to soothe the tears of his people. Alalmah made friends with people who were not of the land but who were also not of the Europeans, They believed in a god who was not found among the Europeans. Their own lands had been taken by the Europeans, and they had fought to reclaim them. Because of what had been done to them and to their land, these people were willing to help Alalmah. They were willing to help us to take back our lands. They were willing to help us fight.

We gathered to form our army. At first we gathered in small knots among the hidden places of the jungle. Then, little by little, like brooks rushing to the stream, our numbers grew greater; and we gathered in the hidden villages of our homeland. The people were glad to see us come, but they were hungry and had no meat to share with us. They were thirsty and had no beer to give us. They were glad to see us come, and they were glad to see us go as we headed in our march towards the capital city.

When we left a village, there would be a few more among us — a few more who wanted our land to once again be happy. So it was that our streams became a river. Our spirits rose and soared to heaven. We were sure of victory. The river of our truth would surely save our land.

It was not to be. We had not realized the extent of the Europeans' greed. They sent their own soldiers to fight us outside the capital. They came from the sky with great explosions and guns that would not be quiet. When the day was done, the sun set on a land that was more red than the sky.

Many had come to fight. Many had died. The scavengers would feast well that night. Among the survivors there were only tears and the songs of death. No warrior dared to speak of his bravery. No man could think of honor. The spirits of our companions were too thick upon us.

Our allies had given us one last weapon to use if nothing else prevailed. Alalmah called together a small group of warriors, men who had been with him from the first. I was proud to be one of them. He gave us the weapon. It was in a battered suitcase — one which a European might have carried many years before — a suitcase of wood framing and of brown cloth with scratched and dulled hinges and clasps and a handle of rope where once perhaps leather had been.

Inside that case was death — death that would come with slow sickness. Death would be spread over the capital by a small explosion inside the suitcase. The invisible sickness would seek out the enemy, those who oppressed our people and stole from the land. All in the capital would die. Even my parents, who lived in the city but had sent me to fight with Alalmah — even my parents would die. The sickness once spread could not be called back. The innocent would die with the guilty, the pure with the stained.

I resolved that my parents would not have to suffer the slow death of the sickness. I could not rescue them, but my pistol could give us all a quick end. As Alalmah's trusted friend — one who had stood with him from the beginning — I was one of those sure to be asked to carry the last weapon into the city.

Five of us were chosen. There was one from each direction — from the side of the wide sea, from the strip by the long river, from the deep jungle, from the plain with its swift beasts, and I from the city. It was my honor to show the way.

“You will not be able to return among us,” Alalmah had spoken. “There will be only a short time between your pushing these switches and the explosion which will release death. Do not try to run away, for the long sickness will be worse than the quick death of the explosion. You go to sacrifice your lives that your land may be free. Make your peace with the spirits of the other world. Tell them that soon you will be among them. Rehearse well the stories you will tell them that they may let you dwell in peace and not haunt the land.

“Do not think to tell the living. They will know your names. They will hear your story, for all will be told. This story will be told and told again to sons and daughters and to their sons and daughters. Your names will be forever.”

Thus were we instructed and felt the power of Alalmah's words.

Near the market where one could buy birds with feathers of honor, near the well where the great beauty of the earth had seduced the god of the heavens and bore his children, who were the first of the people — there a place had been prepared. Deep in a crevice dug in a clay wall, the suitcase was to be placed. Great was my honor, for I alone had seen the place. I alone would show the way.

We approached the city with fear, but there were no guards to stop us. Nor were the soldiers of the enemy making sacrifice to the spirits of those they had killed. No, the city was throbbing with the drums of celebration. Beer and the alcohol of the Europeans were flowing freely in the streets. Men with guns staggered from house to house demanding food, women, money, and all they wanted from people who had nothing. Some shot into the air; others shot at the innocent people of the city. Such was the evil; such was the horror of their victory.

We made our way through the chaos of the night. Bent to the ground, we scurried behind the fences and walls. We were as the stealth of animals, and we made our way to the center of the city. Often we stopped and crouched in the shadows. Then we would be close to our enemies — close enough to reach out with a knife and end the drunken revelry. But, we knew that secrecy must be ours, for in it we could bring the slow death to them all.

Innocent people would also die. Such is war. Such would be the horror of my people. Such would be the horror of my land. But my parents, who lived in the city? For them I resolved that life would not end in the suffering of the slow death. For their sake I would not wait by the crevice in the wall. I would not wait for the explosion which would end my life quickly. I would go to them. I would save them from the slow death. I would use my pistol to avoid their suffering.

How great was my torment as I made my way through the alleys and across the vacant lots of the city. How great was the sorrow I felt as I made my way in stealth to end the lives of those who had given life to me. How awful is the lot of he who would kill his parents! How much worse is the lot of he who would allow his parents a slow suffering death!

There was darkness in the houses of the city. I knew that within families huddled in fear. The army of the victors had become a horde of wild creatures. Their riotous songs filled the air; their drunken oaths defiled the night.

I moved away from my friends — away from the secret weapon of the slow death. From shadow to shadow I moved away from the explosion that was soon to come. From shadow to shadow I moved toward what was to be.

Between the hut where my mother cooked and the back door of my parents' home, a drunken soldier alternated in fits of sleep and sudden starts of anger. I crawled on my belly around him; I crawled to the window which looked out on our empty chicken coop. Once the rooster had stood atop that coop and told the world of his majesty. Once my mother had sold the eggs she and I had gathered in that coop. Once my father had chosen and killed one of those chickens for our feasts. The rooster had long ago disappeared. The birds had long since been eaten or stolen. The coop, which once had been as fine as many a house, was rotting. My parents no longer cared. There no longer was reason for their caring.

I opened the shutter and pulled myself onto the sill of the window. I scuttled like a bug over the sill, down the wall and onto the floor. By the faint light of the night I could see my parents huddled together in their fear. They did not recognize me. My father held a knife, the one with which he once killed the chickens for our feasts. He thrust it in the air as if to ward me off. I spoke softly, "My parents, I am home." I said it again and again. "My parents, I am home." Finally, my mother heard the words in my voice and cried out my name.

"Softly, softly," I said reminding her of the evil outside. My father lowered his blade; and I — having closed the shutter — crawled across the darkness to their embraces.

So our arms pulled one another tight together, we heard the muffled blast of an explosion. I knew that the suitcase of slow silent death had been opened.

With my heart's tears for what I had done and seen mixed with tears of pride for the sacrifice I had made and the men beside whom I had fought, I told my parents of my experiences. I told them of the great battle we had lost, and they told me of their weeks of deprivation and of the endless orgy of the victorious. They shed



tears of suffering and tears for neighbors who had disappeared. We all cried for our land and for our people.

With sighs of the pain I knew, I told them of the suitcase and of my resolve that they should not know the slow death. I pulled my pistol from its pocket and told them that we should prepare ourselves to join the spirits in the other world.

My father said that he had been ready for that journey for many days past and that he had asked often for the spirits to come and take him. He prayed to the god of the heavens and to the earth mother. He prayed for the three of us, and he prayed for the spirits of the warriors of the great battle. Then, he took my pistol in his hand, opened his mouth, placed the muzzle between his lower teeth and the gum where his upper teeth had once been, and pulled the trigger.

There was the single sound of the gun. In the quiet of our home it was louder than I had expected. I jumped away as the blood and brain of my father began unspeakably to soak the floor.

That gunshot was followed by the bang of the cooking door being broken in and then by the sound of a rifle. I saw a bright light and, then, I was falling into darkness.

I awoke sprawled on the floor of my parents' house. The back of my head ached and throbbed. I could not move; I could not feel my body. I knew that I had been shot. I knew who had shot me.

The enemy who had shot me was taking my mother. She moaned as he defiled her. I tried to shout at him; no sound came. I tried to move; I could not. I tried to moan; there was nothing — only tears that streamed from my eyes and rushed down my face.

I watched as he took her. I heard him laugh his contempt at her, at my father, at me, at our soldiers. I took comfort in the slow death that would be his. I only prayed that he would kill my mother when he had finished his way.

When he had satisfied himself, the enemy stood over my mother. He had not pulled up his pants, and I could see his buttocks quivering in anticipation. I could smell the sweat of their bodies and the corruption of his act. I could smell my father's death.

The enemy took his rifle from its place and smashed its butt against my mother's head. I heard her last unwilling gasp at life. Then I could smell the thick warmth of her blood. Unsatisfied, he again brought down his gun. I could hear the crunch of her skull.

In my horror, I once more passed into the world of the unconscious.

When I next awoke, the dawn was beckoning through the doorway which led to the hut where my mother had once cooked. Along the path to that hut she had tended flowers whose reds and golds and thick leaves had been my child's hiding place. The flowers had long died. The fatigue of hunger and fear had killed her will and her careful tending.

If it had been long before, if it had been in the time of the flowers, I would have been up gathering the eggs from the now empty coop. I tried to move. It was not possible.

So it is that I lie here. Here I am surrounded by my parents' deaths. Here I am surrounded by the destruction of my land. Here I am surrounded by the greed which has been brought to my people. Here I wait for death. I do not know if it will be the slow sickness or the wound which has paralyzed me, but one of them will surely kill me.

So it is that I practice this my story that I might tell it to the spirits. I shall rehearse it until I have entered their world. There I shall gather once again my parents in my arms, and we shall pull one another tight and hold tight to our love and to our pain forever.  
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