

Ibambe

by Tabatha Stirling

There are other places in the world I could be, Oliver Sabonne thought. Safer places, places with less colour and less troops making their presence known with scowls and the woodpecker chatter of gunfire.

But nowhere in the world had ever made his heart rage like the wild and tumultuous Rwanda.

He might be the only Western person left in Kigali. His sultry Hutu girlfriend Monica had left days ago stealing his grandfather's silver cane. Her eyes had been bright with defiance and death-lust.

He wondered how much Tutsi blood had dried around the badges that his grandfather had collected during his walking trips in the Swiss Alps.

The chanting of the Hutu marchers had become so regular that he felt anxious when it ceased.

Only two days ago he watched from behind the netting as a group of young women with the lighter Tutsi colouring, so beloved by the Belgian Colonists, were dragged by their hair onto a waiting truck. Lips already split, clothes torn and eyes inky black with terror.

The underworld had been left unguarded and its demons were spilling into this city. Almost eighty years of suppressed resentment and hatred now infecting the population.

Oliver had witnessed UN troops in tears, hard men and women who volunteer for these posts. Their military mileage earned in places of rape and despair from Bosnia to Haiti. He had seen lips tremble and faces blanch at the horror and degradation of these civil wars.

Then hurried footsteps on the stairwell and thuds on his door. An insistent but unruly announcement. He looked briefly at the nine Tutsi children huddled in his small kitchen and tried to smile for them.

The bangs on the door were becoming imperious and as he unbolted the locks and slid chains back to acknowledge the baying Hutu hounds outside he wondered if this was the day he would die.

If this was the day when the bribes of whiskey and US dollars would fail to work. If on this day a black bag, smelling of shit and fear, would be pulled over his head — the bloodied roots of a knocked out tooth tickling his neck.

If this day would be the end of the nine, abandoned Tutsi children he had rescued from a kindergarten the week before.

Could he have done more? He didn't think so in a city where a white skin was a reminder of colonial disgrace.

Oliver paused with his hand on the doorknob astonished that the door was still standing just before the top hinge gave way and plaster crumbled around it.

The second hinge blew shortly afterwards and a Hutu rebel, with blood stained teeth and a monstrous machete stepped into the room. Oliver looked up into the man's eyes and saw no trace of mercy.

