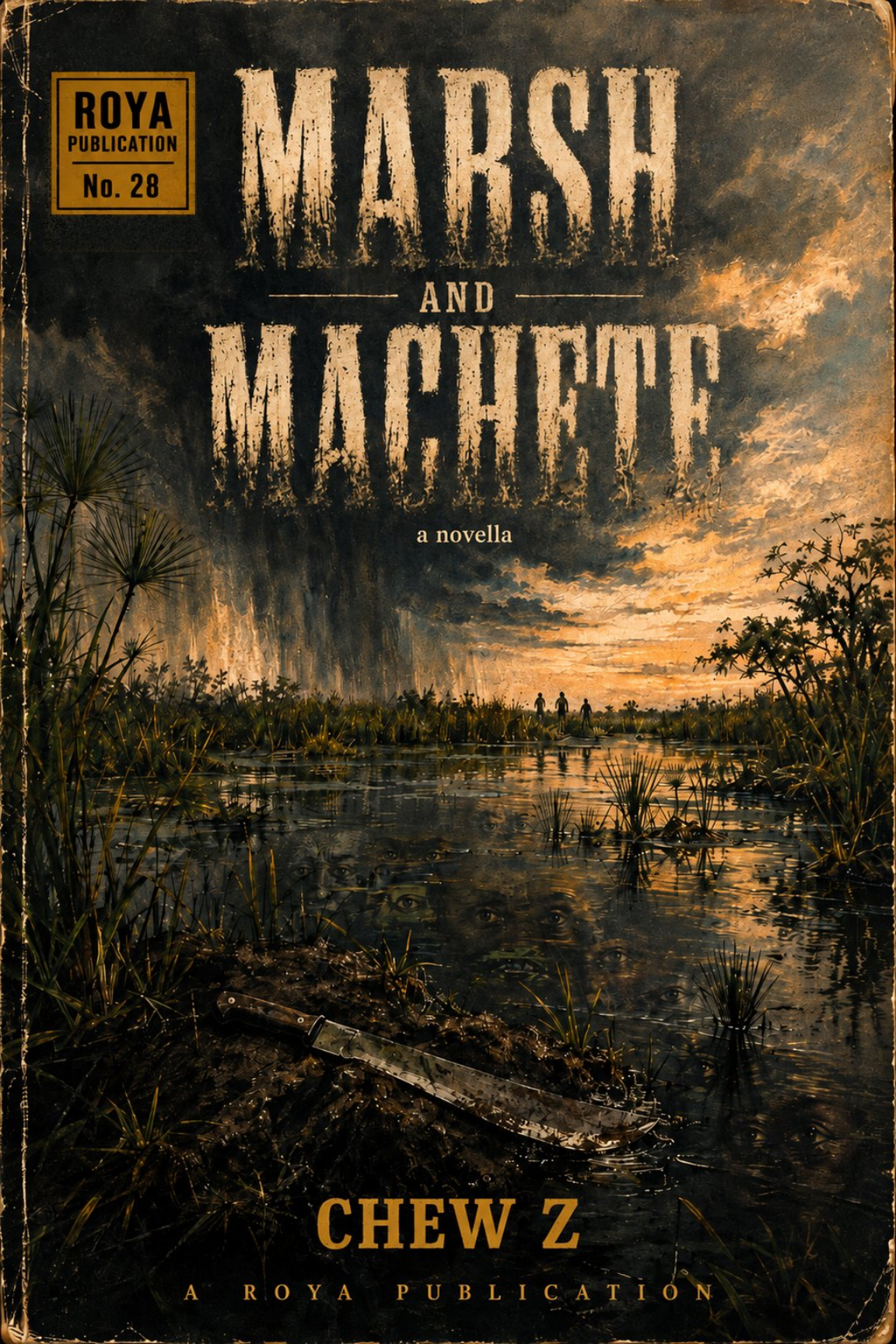


ROYA
PUBLICATION
No. 28

MARSH AND MACHETE

a novella



CHEW Z

A ROYA PUBLICATION

MARSH AND MACHETE

Chew Z

Printed in the Reach

Roya Publication No. 28

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

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ISBN 979-8-952790-27-8

Roya Publications

Publication No. 28

Typeset in DejaVu Serif.

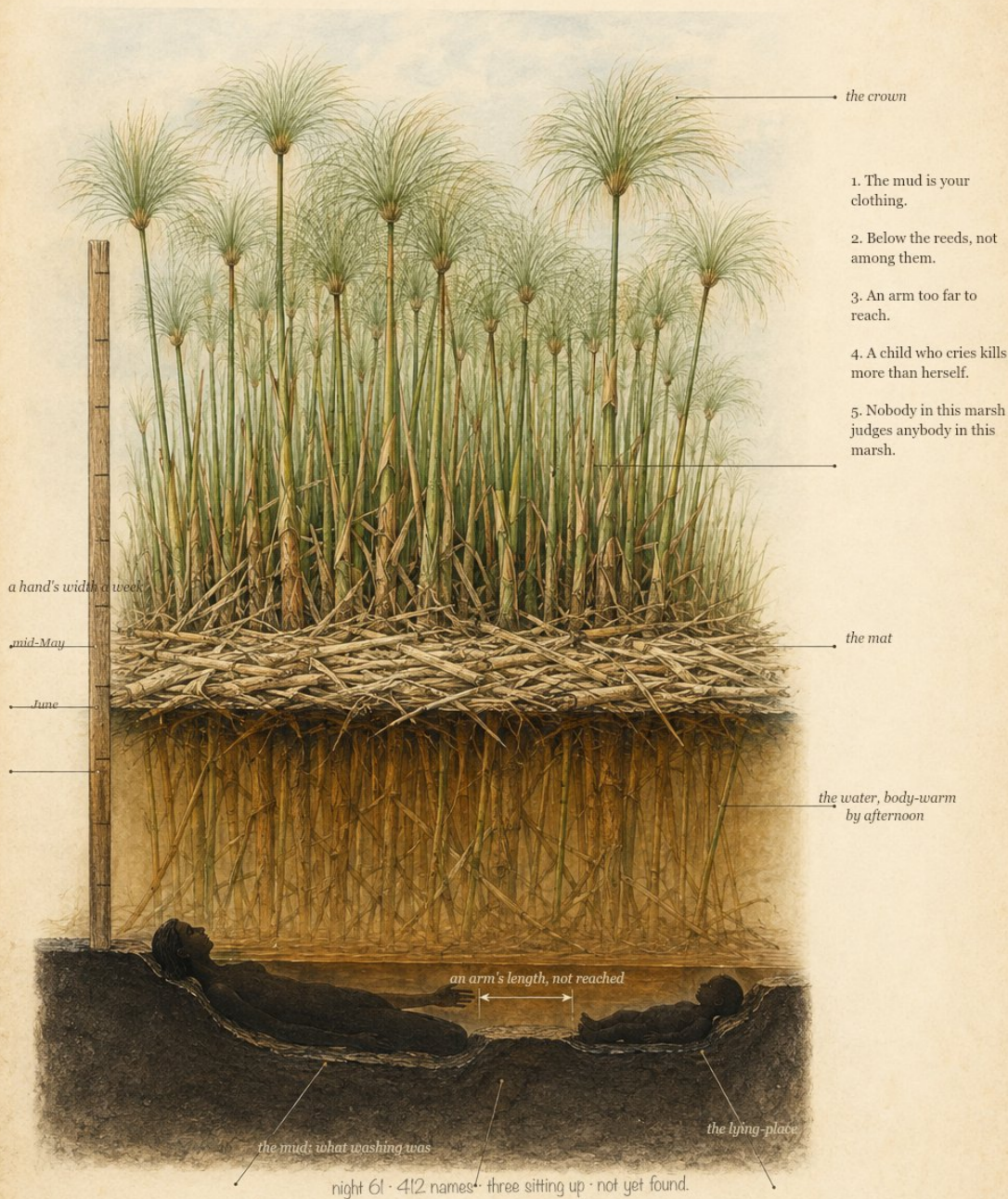
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The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, its documented mechanisms, and the historical events referenced herein are matters of record, used with the intention of fidelity to that record; nothing in this novella should be read as a literal account of any specific hill, commune, station, or person.

*Still water is two things.
Lean close, and it is a mirror;
stand back, and it is a lid.
The water does not choose.
The water is not asked.*

— a saying of the hills, as an old man told it

THE WATER LESSON



The lying-place, as the old cutter of papyrus taught it: under the crown, not among the reeds; the face up, the mouth and nose alone above water in the shadow of the mat; the mud for clothing; the child an arm's length away and not reached for; and the water falling a hand's width a week from the middle of May, until the marsh, on a schedule, handed its people over.

SYNOPSIS

Rwanda, April 1994. On a hill above the papyrus marshes, the greeting is muraho — “you are still there” — and Vestine has exchanged it with her neighbor Évariste every market morning for ten years. Then a plane falls out of the sky over the capital, the Family Radio’s warm-voiced Cousin announces that the household has work to do, and within a week the hill is killing itself by list and by schedule: barriers made of benches, machetes checked out like farm tools, her own house courteously informed that it is “not until Thursday.” When the church — the ground that held in every earlier terror — becomes the trap it was always going to be, Vestine takes her six-year-old niece down into the one country with no houses and no lists: the marsh.

There, under the tutelage of an old papyrus-cutter who knows the channels the way priests know liturgy, she learns the season’s only surviving discipline — the stillness: mud for clothing, water for a roof, ten motionless hours a day among the floating dead while the hunt works the reeds on farmer’s hours and the radio cheerfully reads out her name. As the long rains end and the water begins handing its people over, the stillness deepens into something stranger than hiding — hours dissolving, the body’s edges going, a wide listening with no one at the window — a state that is at once the only refuge the genocide cannot enter and, perhaps, the genocide finishing its work by other means. A hundred days, one season: somewhere else on earth it was simply spring. This is what the word genocide means from inside, told by a survivor who kept the count — and by the two soft clicks of a tongue that called her back, dusk after dusk, from the bottom of the water.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This book uses the word genocide without euphemism, because the word was built for exactly this and the record of 1994 meets its definition with terrible precision. The term was coined in 1944 by the lawyer Raphael Lemkin from the Greek *genos* — not “many people” but lineage, stock, the family tree — and the Latin *-cide*: the killing not of persons but of descent itself, the destruction of a group as such, root and seed. In roughly one hundred days between April and July 1994, at least 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were murdered in Rwanda — the fastest genocide in recorded history, conducted mostly with machetes, mostly by neighbors, organized by list and schedule and radio. The mechanics in these pages are matters of documented record: the identity cards that printed ethnicity, a colonial administration’s invention carried in every adult pocket; the barriers of ordinary men at every junction; the killing kept to working hours and called, in the killers’ own testimony, simply “work”; the churches — sanctuary in every previous pogrom — deliberately converted into traps where thousands died in a day; the radio station that functioned as the massacre’s command network, reading out names and hiding places between pop songs, in a warmth the courtroom transcripts could never reproduce; and the marshes of Bugesera, where thousands survived weeks of daily hunts lying motionless in the papyrus by day and living by night, and where thousands more did not. The United Nations force in the country was cut to a remnant and ordered not to intervene while the great powers performed their documented labor of avoiding the noun — “acts of genocide may have occurred” — because the word, once spoken, carried treaty obligations they did not intend to meet. The perpetrators’ state of mind is also on record, in their own words, given to interviewers after the fact: the testimony of ordinary farmers who describe the work, the schedule, the cutting, and the not-seeing. I have invented a hill, a marsh, a radio station, and the people on them. I have invented nothing structural.

What drew me, inside that record, was the survivors' account of the hiding itself — because the marsh imposed, on those it saved, an altered state as profound as anything in this series' pharmacy. Enforced stillness, ten hours a day, for weeks: body-temperature water, the dissolution of the felt boundary between flesh and marsh, time coming off its spool, thought thinned to a listening without an owner, waking visions indistinguishable from memory — and inside it, by every account, a strange cessation of fear, because terror requires a self to land on and the self had been dissolved as a precaution. It is the third altered state of this war cycle, and the darkest: Mang and Mustard's drug opened a door outward; The Clear Ones' famine closed the body's rooms one by one; the stillness of the marsh is a mind burying itself alive in order to remain — survival and self-erasure performed in a single act, ten hours a day, on the enemy's schedule. Whether that state was the one country the genocide could not enter, or the genocide completing itself inside its survivors, is the quarrel at this book's center, and I have left both pans loaded, because the survivors' testimony leaves them loaded. What is not in dispute is the mechanism that brought people back: someone calling. The whole art, an old man says in these pages, is to be called out of the water — and the genocide's deepest design was the murder of everyone who might call. That is what killing a family tree is for.

A last word about the season. The hundred days ran from the end of the long rains through the start of the dry season — the rains that hid the hunted, the punctual drought that betrayed them. It was, on the calendar of the rest of the earth, the spring and early summer of an ordinary year. People planted gardens that season, and graduated, and honeymooned, and complained about the weather, and were entitled to; that is what the world's ordinary seasons are for. But the same sun did both. Somewhere it ripened tomatoes, and somewhere it dried a marsh at a hand's width a week so that the machetes could walk in. The book asks only that the reader hold that simultaneity for sixty-nine pages: a season is the same length for everyone, and it is not the same season.

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I. THE HILL

ONE. THE GREETING

The word for hello on the hill was muraho, and it means, taken apart, something close to: you are still there. That is the whole greeting. Not how are you, not good morning — an observation, confirmed daily, neighbor to neighbor, path to path, for as long as anyone's grandmother could remember. You are still there. And the answer confirmed it back, and the two of you went on toward your fields, existence mutually witnessed, the ledger of the hill balanced for another day.

Vestine crossed the hill four mornings a week that spring, down to the crossroads market with dried beans and her mother's sewing work, and she has counted it since, many times, in the years when counting was all that was left of them: between her door and the market she exchanged the greeting perhaps thirty times. The Nsengiyumva household at the first bend. The cabaret — the drinking house, a mud room with benches and a shelf of banana beer — where the men called it out over the low wall. Old Théoneste if he was up from the marsh with his bundles of papyrus, smelling of water. And at the junction where the paths joined, most mornings for ten years, Évariste.

Évariste of the two plots down. Évariste who had played on the same team as her brother Sylvere, forward and keeper, a decade of Sundays; who had carried the second pole of the stretcher at her mother's funeral and stood at the grave with his hat in his two hands; who owed her household three thousand francs from the bad season two years back and had repaid it to the last coin, on time, walking it up the hill himself. His muraho had a particular music. He gave the second syllable a small lift, like a man tipping a hat with his voice. Ten years. You are still there. You are still there. You are still there.

She would like to say — this is the thing she tells the visitors who come now with their notebooks — she would like to say that something was visible. That an honest witness, paying attention, would have seen it coming up the hill the way you see rain coming up the valley. And it is true that things were in place, and she can

list them now the way a mechanic lists the parts of an engine he has taken apart on a cloth.

There was the card. Everyone over sixteen carried the little booklet, and on its first page, printed, an entry no one chose: ubwoko — the kind. Hutu, Tutsi, Twa. The Belgians had put it there sixty years before, when they ruled, and had measured noses and counted cattle to decide who was written down as what, and the card had outlived them, handed on from government to government the way a house passes on its stove. On the hill it had meant, for years, mostly paperwork — which school, which quota, which jobs were closed to you. A background tax. Everyone's pocket carried the state's opinion of their blood, and everyone was so used to it that the pocket forgot.

There was the radio. Radio Umuryango, it called itself — the Family Radio; umuryango is the family, the household, the people of one enclosure — and it was new that year and it was wonderful. Everyone said so. The old government station read announcements like a priest reading debts; the Family Radio played music from Kinshasa, took requests, told jokes, knew the football scores. Its afternoon man called every listener his cousin. And in among the songs, in the same warm voice, it talked about the inyenzi. The cockroaches. Officially the word meant the rebel army over the border, the Tutsi exiles' front that had been fighting the government in the north for three years. But the broadcasts had a way of letting the word slide, of using it for the rebels in one sentence and for the neighbors in the next, for the kind written in the card, until the two meanings wore into one — and a cockroach, the Cousin liked to remind the family, is not a creature you argue with. It is a creature you find where it hides.

There were young men drilling on the football field two hills over, with sticks for rifles, and everyone knew whose youth wing they were, and they had a name that meant those who attack together, and the district had taken delivery, that dry season, of crates of new machetes — farming tools, the invoice said, though the hill already owned its machetes the way it owned its hands.

And there were the lists. Nobody had seen the lists. Everybody knew about the lists.

So yes: the parts were on the cloth, and she can name each one. But an engine on a cloth is not a moving engine, and this is what she needs the visitors to understand, because it is the part they cannot use in their notebooks: nothing on the hill felt like an engine. It felt like the hill. The Cousin was a voice you laughed at while you shelled beans. The card was a nuisance at the roadblock on tax days. The drilling boys were somebody's unemployable sons. She walked to market on the third of April, in the last week of the long rains, in the green smell of the saturated hill, and Évariste stood at the junction under an umbrella pied like a magpie, and lifted his voice's hat to her, muraho, with the little music on the second syllable, and she answered, and they spoke about the price of roofing nails, and there was nothing else in it. She has taken that morning apart more times than any mechanic has taken apart any engine on this earth. There was nothing else in it.

That is the fact about the hill that the notebooks are never satisfied with, and it is the only fact she insists on, because it is the one that cost the most to learn: the machine was all assembled, in the open, in plain sight, part by part by part — and the greeting was still true. Both things. Until the night of the sixth of April both things were true at once, and anyone who says they could have read the one inside the other is telling you about a different hill.

TWO. THE NIGHT OF THE PLANE

The plane came down on the evening of the sixth of April, in Kigali, an hour's road to the north, and the hill did not hear the missiles or the crash. The hill heard the radio.

It was Sylvere who woke her, standing in the doorway with the little set in his hand, the volume low, his thumb on the dial as if holding a small animal still. The music was wrong. That was all, at first. The Family Radio played dance music into the night, every night; now it was playing something slow and orchestral, the kind of music governments keep for dying, and between the pieces a voice — not the Cousin, an older voice, careful — said that the

President's plane had been brought down over the capital, that the President was dead, that the criminals responsible were known, and that the population should remain where it was and await instructions.

"Remain where it is," Sylvere repeated, in the dark of the doorway. He was two years older than her, a quiet man, a repairer of radios and locks, which is a trade that teaches you how things are put together. "Since when does anyone have to tell a hill at midnight to remain where it is."

They did not sleep. Nobody on the hill slept; you could feel the not-sleeping through the walls, the whole slope lying in the dark with its eyes open, listening to the same frequency. Toward morning the careful voice was replaced by the Cousin's — and this, Vestine has said since, was the true beginning, the actual first hour of it, though not one blow had yet been struck anywhere she could see: the Cousin came on the air in his same warm morning way, the voice that had read out birthdays and football scores all season, and began, warmly, to explain who had killed the President. The *inyenzi* had done it, he said. The cockroaches had murdered the father of the family. And the cockroach, my cousins — you know this, your grandfather told you — the cockroach you see on the wall at night is never alone. For every one in the open there are ten inside the walls. Inside the houses, my cousins. Inside the enclosures. You know the houses. Stay awake with me. We will have work to do.

Work. Gukora, in the language: to work, to do. She heard the word slide past in the flow of his talk, that first dawn, and thought nothing of it, because it is the most ordinary word a farming country owns. Within a week it would be the only word anyone used for the thing that was happening, and nobody would ever have to be told what it meant. The genocide came to the hill dressed in the vocabulary of agriculture, and this was not an accident and not a code the hill needed teaching. It was the opposite of a code. It made the thing a chore. A season's task, announced on the family radio, the way the radio announced the start of the coffee harvest.

By mid-morning of the seventh there were barriers on the roads. Not soldiers — the hill had no soldiers; a barrier of eucalyptus poles and a bench from the cabaret, at the junction, at the crossroads, at the mouth of every path, and standing at them, checking the little booklets, the men of the hill. She watched from the top of the path with a water can in her hand, and this is the sight she has never gotten the notebooks to hold properly: it looked like a work party. It looked like the communal labor Saturdays when the hill turned out to dig the road drains, the same men, the same postures, somebody's radio propped in the same banana tree, except the tools leaning against the bench were not hoes.

Down in the valley, across on the facing slope, the first smoke stood up from a house at around noon. Straight up, unhurried, a household fire's smoke, except that it thickened instead of thinning, and then the sound arrived, late and small across the distance, of people beginning to scream at the far end of it.

Sylvère stood beside her and watched it burn and said the sentence that she would hear, in the coming weeks, in the mouths of the dying, in every hiding place, from people with less and less left to say it with — the sentence that was the last piece of the old hill still working, its last assumption, made of ten thousand mornings of muraho, and wrong:

"It will pass in a few days," her brother said. "This is politics from the capital. We know these people."

We know these people. It was true. That was the thing the visitors' notebooks kept trying to make simple, and it would not go simple, then or ever: it was completely true, and it saved no one. They knew these people. The greeting had been real. And on the eighth of April, in the morning, the men who knew them began coming up the paths in groups, unhurried, with the radio going, to the houses whose kind was written in the card — beginning, because lists prefer order, at the bottom of the hill.

THREE. THE NEIGHBORS

The word genocide was coined by a lawyer, and Vestine learned it, like most of the hill, from the shortwave — the BBC's African service, in the second week, naming from London the thing she was inside of. Sylvère held the set to the window for reception with the volume at a whisper, because by then a radio tuned to the wrong station was itself testimony against a household. The English voice said the word, and then a translator said it in French, *génocide*, and Sylvère, the repairer, the man who knew how things were put together, took the word apart for her in the dark the way he took apart a lock. Genos, he said. It is Greek. It is not the word for a crowd, or a number of people. It is the word for a birth-line. A stock. A family tree. The word does not mean killing many. It means killing a many that is one thing — killing the tree itself, root, trunk, and seed, so that nothing of it grows again. That is why they do the children, he said, with the flat voice he used over a broken mechanism whose fault he had finally located. It is not cruelty running loose. It is thoroughness. You do not weed a field and leave the seeds.

She needed the word explained exactly once. The hill had been demonstrating the definition for six days.

It had begun on the eighth, at the bottom of the slope, and it went by list and it went by household, and this was the first thing that separated it forever from every fight, every riot, every burst of troubles the old people could remember: it was not a wave. A wave breaks and recedes. This was an agenda. The groups came up the hill in the morning like men going to a communal Saturday — hoes, machetes, clubs studded with nails, one or two grenades bought from soldiers, the radio carried along on a shoulder — and they did the houses in order, and at the end of the working day they went home, and ate, and drank at the cabaret, whose owner kept a slate of what was drunk, and the next morning they resumed. Killing had hours. It knocked off in the late afternoon. Survivors of the first days who crawled from under the dead learned the schedule before they learned anything else: the work was daytime work, and the night belonged to whoever was left.

The methods she will state once, in the flat register the notebooks require, because you asked what the word means and the word means this. It was done with the machete mostly, which is a farm tool, and it was done from close, which meant every death was a task performed by a particular pair of arms and took a particular length of time. It was done to the men first and then to everyone; the lists' economy dissolved within days into totality. Households were done in their yards, in front of each other, in an order the killers chose. Some paid money to be shot instead — the bullet was sold as a mercy, at a price, and the price was known. The wounded were left in the open through the night and finished the next shift. Infants were not exempted; the reasoning was announced on the radio and repeated at the barriers, and it was Sylvère's reasoning in reverse, the definition applied with care: the seed is the crop. And through all of it, above all of it, the radio played, because every work party carried one, so that the hill's last days were conducted to dance music, the Cousin's warm voice keeping time — courage, my cousins, the work goes well, do not tire, the graves are not yet full.

On the tenth she went down to the junction barrier because there was no water and the path to the spring passed through it, and Évariste was on the barrier.

He had a machete on a strap and her family's history in his head and he checked her card. He knew what her card said. He had known her card's word for ten years the way you know a neighbor's roof leaks — a fact about them, filed, unused. He turned the booklet over in his fingers, and looked at her, and said, "Muraho, Vestine." With the little music on the second syllable. Exactly as at the junction, under the magpie umbrella, in the green week that was seven days and one world ago. You are still there.

And then he said the thing that she carried into the marsh and out the other side of the season, the sentence that is her contribution to the study of the word genocide, the sentence the lawyers' definition does not contain and requires: he leaned in slightly, confidentially, a neighbor doing a neighbor a kindness within the rules, and said, "Go and draw your water. Your house is not until Thursday."

Not anger. Not a blade raised. A man she knew, informing her, helpfully, of the schedule on which he would kill her family. The genocide in one sentence, and the sentence was polite. She stood at the barrier holding her card, and understood, in the way you understand a step that is not there in the dark, the thing she would spend a hundred days learning in the mud: the greeting and the list were not enemies. They lived in the same man without crowding each other. He wished her well; her house was Thursday; both were true at once, and the second did not even raise the first's pulse. Whatever had been done to the hill in those years of radio and cards and lists, its masterpiece was this: it had built a country in which a man could hold the door of the world open for you with one hand and close your family's line with the other, and feel, walking home to his supper, that he had been, on the whole, that day, a decent neighbor.

On Wednesday night she took Chance — her sister's girl, six years old, staying with them since the roads closed — and a cloth of beans, and Sylvère's small radio, because Sylvère would not leave the house. He was the eldest; the house was the family's; a man does not hand his father's enclosure to a list. We know these people, he said again, quietly, at the door, already knowing it was no longer an argument but a place to stand, and he put his hand on Chance's head, and Vestine went down the hill in the dark with the child on her back, off the paths, through the banana rows, toward the only place on the map of her life that had no houses on it and no lists, the low country, the smell of water — repeating to herself the sentence old Théoneste had said years ago, in another world, about another trouble, leaning on his bundles of papyrus with the marsh mud drying on his shins:

When men hunt the hill, the marsh does not vote.

FOUR. THE CHURCH

She did not go straight to the marsh. She went where the hill had always gone, because the body's map is older than the week's news, and on the body's map of every trouble in living memory

there was one building with walls that held: the church at the crossroads town.

In the troubles of years past — and there had been troubles, pogroms in waves, 'fifty-nine, 'sixty-three, 'seventy-three, each one teaching the same lesson — the churches had been the ground that held. The killers of those years stopped at the door. Whatever they were willing to do in a banana grove, the nave refused it for them; God kept a country the lists could not enter; and every Tutsi family on every hill carried that lesson in its bones as tested fact: when it comes, go to the church. So they went. By the time Vestine came down to the crossroads before dawn with Chance asleep on her back, the church held more people than the town did — the hill families, the valley families, thousands, in the nave and the sacristy and the school rooms and the yard, penned close, quiet as luggage, waiting inside the one lesson their dead had left them.

She found floor space against the north wall, below a window of blue and yellow glass, and she has kept, from the day and a half of waiting, one memory she still counts as belonging to the old world: a woman she did not know, seeing Chance shiver, unwrapped her own outer cloth and gave it, and would not take it back, and said — the ordinary sentence, the church sentence, the sentence of the whole gathered hill — here we are safe.

The lesson was obsolete. That is the fact of that season which the histories state in a line and the line cannot hold: the organizers knew the lesson too. They had grown up inside the same fact. And so the churches, this time, were not the exception to the plan. They were the plan. Why hunt a hill house by house when the hill, taught by its own dead, would gather itself into one room for you and wait?

They came on the second morning, at working hours. Militia and gendarmes and the men of the barriers, hundreds, and they ringed the compound first, without hurry, the way you close a gate before starting in the pen. She was near the north wall. She heard the doors being tested and barred from outside, and the first thing through the windows was not men. It was grenades.

What happened in the church she will state in the flat register, once, and the reader who needs it colored may close the book, because the color was the point of the exercise and she declines to reproduce it. The grenades came through the glass at intervals, unhurried, and after each one the packed floor rearranged itself downward. Then the doors were opened from outside — their own doors, opened onto them — and the work came in with the daylight behind it, and it was machete work, pew by pew, row by row, hour upon hour, with pauses to rest the arms, because a church holding thousands is more than one shift's labor even for hundreds of workers, and the radio played in the yard where the workers took their rests, and the Cousin's voice came in through the broken windows across the sound the nave was making, keeping the family's spirits up. It took that day and part of the next. Toward the end the workers went through the floor of the dead with spears and hoes, testing, the way you turn soil, because stillness was the last hiding place and they knew it, and this was the first lesson of her new education, learned under the north wall with the blue and yellow glass in her hair: they know that the living hide among the dead. Stillness alone is nothing. Stillness is the entry fee.

She does not know why she was missed. She has stopped, she says, asking the question, because it has no floor: under her was the woman who had given the cloth, and over her, across her back and the child's, a man she never saw alive, and the blood on her was theirs, and the blade that tested her side went through the man first and arrived spent, a line of fire along her ribs she did not feel until night, and Chance — this is the one particular she will give, because it is the child's earned fact, her entry in the season's ledger — Chance, six years old, under her aunt's body in the noise of the ending world, did what the marsh would spend a hundred days teaching everyone else. She made no sound. From the first grenade to the last shift's whistle, a day and a half, the child made no sound at all.

They came out on the second night, out of the unbreathable dark of the nave, over the floor that was no longer a floor, through the small sacristy window whose bars a grenade had sprung. The town was lit here and there and loud with the cabarets; the workers were

drinking their wages. She stood in the banana rows with the child on her back and the wet cloth of her dress going cold, and looked back once at the black shape of the church against the sky — the building that had held, the walls their dead had tested and certified, the one lesson the family tree had saved up for exactly this, now a tool in the tool-kit of the people who cut the tree — and she understood that there was no inherited map left. Every mark on it had been read by the other side. Whatever survived now would survive off the map.

Downhill was the smell of water. She walked toward it. At the edge of the low country, where the banana rows give out and the ground goes soft and the papyrus stands up against the stars like a crowd with its back to you, an old man rose out of the reeds so quietly that the night did not change shape — Théoneste, with a hoe in one hand and mud to the thigh, looking at her and the child and the cold shine of the marsh behind him.

"The church," he said. Not a question.

"The church," she said.

He nodded once, at the whole of it, the entire obsolete map, and turned, and held the papyrus open with his arm like a door.

"Then you are caught up," he said. "Come in and be nothing."

INTERLUDE I. ON AIR

6:04. Music: a Kinshasa rumba, bright guitars, the one that was everyone's favorite at the New Year. It plays out whole. The Cousin lets the last chord finish before he speaks, because he is a professional and the family deserves a professional.

6:08. "Good morning, good morning, my cousins. You are listening to Radio Umuryango, the Family Radio, and it is a beautiful morning over the hills — I am told there is mist in the valleys, so drive with care, those of you with vehicles, we cannot spare you." A smile you can hear. "Birthdays. We have birthdays. Marie-Grâce turns nine today in Gitarama — nine years old, Marie-Grâce, may you grow tall. And a listener writes that his mother completes seventy years today and still carries her own water. Seventy, my

cousins. That is a woman of the old strength. The family salutes you, mama."

6:12. "Now. The communiqués." No change of voice. This is the thing the transcripts cannot carry, the thing you had to be under the sky that season to know: no change of voice at all. "The work advances well in the sectors of the lake road. The councilor there is thanked by name; his sector is an example. But my cousins, I must speak seriously for one minute, as your cousin — there are sectors that are letting the family down. The work is being left half done. You clear the house and you do not clear the ceiling. You clear the yard and you do not walk the banana rows behind the yard. My cousins: when your mother sends you to weed, does she praise you for the middle of the field? The edges, my cousins. The edges are where it hides. And I am told — this is confirmed, this comes from serious people — that they are going into the marshes now. Yes. Into the mud, like what they are. They lie down in the water among the reeds and they think the family's arms will tire before the dry season comes." A pause exactly as long as a shrug. "The dry season is coming, my cousins. It comes every year. Ask your grandfather. Nobody has ever had to fetch the dry season."

6:19. Music: a request. "This one goes out to the boys at the barrier at the fork of the two roads — you know yourselves — from the girls of the sector, for courage in the work. The girls say: we see you." Laughter in the studio, more than one voice. The song is a love song. It plays out whole.

6:24. "A point of information, because the family asks. Foreign radios are using a big word for our situation. A word of lawyers. My cousins, do not tire yourselves with the words of lawyers who eat cold chicken in London. What is happening is simple and your grandfather had a word for it and the word is: work. The field was let go for thirty years and now it is being weeded. That is the whole of the news. When a man weeds his own field, does he send to London for a word?"

6:26. "Weather. Sun after the mist, rain again by evening — the long rains are on their last weeks now, my cousins, finish your planting." The smallest pause, and then, in exactly the voice of the

planting advice: "And finish the other work also. Both have their season. Neither waits."

6:27. Music. Guitars. Somewhere under the mist, in the reeds, three thousand people lie in the water and hear it small and tinny from a radio in a banana tree on the ridge, where the day shift is assembling, and the ones in the water who are still keeping count know it is a Tuesday, because the Cousin does the birthdays on a Tuesday.

II. THE MARSH

FIVE. THE WATER LESSON

The marsh had one man who knew it entire, and the season had delivered him, with its taste for economy, to the one job that could spend the knowledge: Théoneste, cutter of papyrus, setter of fish traps, fifty years in the channels — the marsh's own registrar, become, in a week, its doorkeeper.

He gave the lesson in the dark of her first night, in a voice pitched under the frogs, while Chance slept against his bundles, and Vestine understood before it was half done that she was being taught a discipline — that the marsh had rules the way the church had had walls, and that these, unlike those, had not yet been read by the other side.

"First," he said, "the mud is not dirt. The mud is your clothing." He took a handful of the black, sulfur-smelling paste from beside the channel and showed her, on his own forearm, the covering of it — every finger of skin, the neck, the ears, the parting of the hair. "Skin shines. Wet skin in daylight shines like a pot. The mud does two things: it puts out the shine, and it feeds the mosquitoes something that is not you. You will cover the child new every morning, before the light, like dressing her for school. It is now what washing was."

"Second: depth. You do not hide in the reeds. Reeds are where they look — reeds are the wall, and a wall is the first place a searcher puts his hand. You hide below the reeds. Here—" he moved aside a shelf of matted papyrus at the channel's edge, and under it was water the color of tea, and under the water was a lying-place, a trench of mud the length of a person, one of who knew how many he had made or found in fifty years — "you lie in the water, under the mat, with the face turned up and only the mouth and the nose above, inside the shadow of the crown. The water is warm by day. That is its kindness. You will learn its other qualities."

"Third: spacing. This is the hard one, and you will hate me for it." He looked at the sleeping child while he said it. "A family that hides together dies together. One found is all found — I have watched it now four times. You will lie where I put you, and the child will lie apart from you, an arm too far to reach, and you will spend the day

not reaching. The ones they find, they find because a mother moved to a child, or a child cried out to a mother. Love is loud. In the marsh, love is the loudest thing there is, and the work has learned its frequency. So we will love each other at night, when it is safe, and by day" — he pressed the mat of papyrus back down over the tea-colored water, and it vanished; she was looking at the place and could not find it — "by day we are strangers who have never met."

"Fourth: the child." He said it without softening, because softening, she would learn, was a currency he had stopped spending on anything but acts. "A child who cries in this marsh in working hours kills more than herself. It cannot be explained to the small ones and it does not need to be explained to this one; she was in the church; she is ahead of the grown people in the only subject now taught. But hear me, because mothers have come into this water before you: there are women in these channels who have held the mouths of their own infants against their bodies through a sweep, holding their own hand down with their other hand, and there are women who did it and the child did not breathe again, and they are in the water with us still, both kinds, the women and the small ones, and nobody — " he stopped; the frogs carried the pause; it was the only seam in the whole lesson — "nobody in this marsh judges anybody in this marsh. That is the fifth rule and the last one and it is the roof over all the others. Whatever the day makes a person do to remain, the night receives them back without questions. We did not write this season. We are only trying to be still there when it ends."

You are still there. The greeting, gone feral, wading, waiting out its own hill.

He settled the mat over the second trench, the child's, and showed Vestine the reach between the two lying-places — the arm's length that was too far, that was the whole doctrine in a distance — and then he said the sentence that named the discipline, the one she would carry into the deepest weeks and turn over in the water-hours the way the dying turn a ring:

"Everything on the hill has turned against its purpose," Théoneste said. "The radio gathers the family to kill the family. The church collects the people for the machetes. The card the state gave you is

the knife it kills you with. Only one thing here has kept its old use." He put his flat hand on the black water, gently, as on the flank of a cow. "Water hides what enters it. It did this before people, it will do it after people, it does not read lists and it cannot be preached to. The marsh is the last honest thing in the prefecture. Your work now is one work: be what the water is. Be still, be dark, hold what you hold, and give the day nothing." He rose, mud to the thigh, old registrar of the last unread country, and looked down at her in the lying-place with the child breathing an arm too far away.

"They have the hills, the roads, the church, and the radio," he said. "We have the stillness. Learn it better than they learned theirs."

SIX. THE WORK HOURS

The hunt kept farmer's hours, and this was the first structural fact of the new life, the beam everything else hung from: it came down off the hills in the morning after the workers had eaten, and it left before dark, because the workers did not like the marsh at night, and between those two bells the marsh belonged to the day shift, and the day shift belonged to the work.

They heard it assemble before they saw it — the marsh is an ear; sound walks on water — the day shift gathering on the ridge road with its radio and its whistles, the talk and the tool-clink of a Saturday labor party, and then the lines coming down the slope and in along the causeways, and then the day's first sounds of the search itself, which Vestine learned one by one, involuntarily, in the water under the mat, until she could follow the whole shift by ear the way a farmer follows weather.

The sounds had kinds. There was the swish-and-chop of the clearing parties, machetes widening the paths along the channel banks — housekeeping sounds, almost peaceable, the sound of the marsh being made more searchable, a little more every day, the season's arithmetic conducted in vegetation. There was the probing: blades and spear-hafts and hoe-handles driven down through the floating mats at a walking rhythm, the marsh's whole surface interrogated a step at a time — a deep, blunt, swallowed sound, the sound of the water being asked the question, and she

never once heard it without her body performing its own answer, the total involuntary stillness, the breath parked, the heart itself seeming to kneel down behind the ribs. There was the calling — voices pitched friendly, in the language, come out, come out, it is over, the ones who come out are being taken to the commune, there is milk at the commune for the children — the day shift fishing with the one bait the marsh still rose to, and some days the marsh rose to it, and then there was the last kind of sound.

The finding had a grammar. It went: the probe-rhythm breaking off. A shout — one syllable, the discoverer's, with a lift in it she refused ever to name to herself, because the lift was joy. Then the convergence, many feet through water, fast. Then the voices of the found — and here the grammar forked, because some begged and some bargained and some went silent, and the marsh under its mats lay listening to each of its own being subtracted, unable to move, unable not to hear, the whole hidden nation attending each single death in a stillness that was the deaths' only witness and could not even close its eyes, since a closed eye cannot watch the mat above it for shadow. And then — this was the grammar's last clause, the one that took her longest to survive knowing — then the work sounds resumed at the walking rhythm, one beat later, in the same measure, the probe going on down the channel as if the finding had been a stone in the field, tossed to the margin, the furrow resuming. Ten thousand a day, the season's ledger says of those weeks, across all the marshes and hills of the country: a number with no sound in it. She had the sound. The sound was a walking rhythm that did not change.

By the second week she knew the shifts apart. There was a morning line that worked the eastern causeway and was lazy, that probed the mats at the edges and would not wade past the knee — men doing the middle of the field, as the Cousin complained. There was a party with dogs, twice, but the marsh defeated dogs; the water carried too many of the dead; the whole low country was one scent by May. And there was one line that frightened even Théoneste, that came irregularly and worked in silence — no radio, no calling, no talk, only the probe-rhythm, slow, patient, off the causeways and into the deep channels, men who had learned the marsh's own first

rule and turned it around: that the searcher too could be still, could stop, could stand ten minutes in the tea-colored water beside a matted shelf, listening for the breath under it. Those days the marsh went down to a depth below stillness, into something she had no word for yet, and the frogs sang over the whole submerged nation, and the water held its property, and the line moved on.

At dusk the whistles called the day shift up out of the low country, and the sounds of it recessed up the slopes — the talk, the radio, a snatch of singing some evenings, tired men pleased with a full day — up to the cabarets, whose noise on a still night carried out over the water until late: the laughter of the working hill, the day's wages going down the throat, while below them the marsh surfaced in the dark, arm by arm, mat by mat, and counted itself.

That was the day. That was every day. The hunt was not an event; the hunt was the climate; and the ones under the mats were not waiting for it to end so much as learning, hour by motionless hour, what the marsh had always known and had now enrolled them in — that a season cannot be fought or fled, only outlasted, and that outlasting is a full-time work with hours crueler than the killers': theirs ended at dusk. The stillness worked around the clock.

SEVEN. THE STILL ONES

Her mind, in the water-hours, with nothing to do but listen and last, began of its own accord to sort — because a mind must work at something or come apart, and sorting was the work her season assigned. Sohrab of another war sorted bodies, and Danylo of another winter sorted eyes; Vestine, flat in the tea-colored water under the papyrus crown, sorted stillnesses. There were three kinds in the marsh, and by May she could tell them apart at a distance, through reeds, in fragments, the way you know handwriting.

The first was the stillness of the hiding, her own kind, and its signature was effort. It was a made thing, muscular, expensive — a stillness with a pulse hammering inside it, a wire pulled to singing and held. The hiding stillness listened; that was its tell if you knew to look; it oriented, minutely, a degree at a time, toward sound, the

way a sunflower tracks — a face under a mat turning two centimeters an hour to keep an ear on the probe-line. It could be perfect for hours and it was never at rest for one second. It was stillness as verb. Everyone doing it emerged at dusk exhausted in a way that had no name on the old hill — not the body's tiredness, though the body was ruined too, but the exhaustion of the string that has been the whole day a note.

The second was the stillness of the dead, and the marsh taught it to her in merciless detail, because the dead were her daylight neighbors, sharing the channels, sharing the mats, and the discipline of the first stillness required studying the second the way an apprentice studies a master: the searchers tested stillness against death constantly — the blade into the floating form, the kick, the probe — and to be passed over was to be a good enough copy. So she learned the master's hand. The dead's stillness was not effort; it was the total absence of address. A dead body in the water has resigned from direction; nothing in it faces anything; it is stillness as a finished fact, with no inside. And the living copy always had an inside — that was the whole terror of the daily examination — the art was to hide the inside, to lie among the resigned and counterfeit their perfect indifference while being, in every cell, a beggar for the next minute. She became, she says, a scholar of how the dead lie in water, their particular agreements with the current, the way the marsh accepted them and moved them fractionally, all day, in its own slow time — and she practiced consenting to be moved, giving her weight to the water's small decisions, because a body that resisted the current had an opinion, and opinions were visible.

The third kind she saw first in the fourth week, in the open, in full working daylight, and thought her mind had broken.

A man was sitting up. In the shallows off the main channel, in the reeds but not in them, visible to fifty meters, a man of the marsh — she knew his face from the night surfacings — was sitting upright in the water in the sun, his hands in his lap, still. Not hiding: his head was above the papyrus line. Not dead: he blinked; once, slowly, like a lizard. He sat the way men sit at the end of a market

day, when the goods are gone and there is nothing left to watch over. The probe-line was audible two channels east and working closer, and he sat in the sun with his hands in his lap and waited for it the way you wait for a bus.

She understood, watching him through the crown of her mat with her heart trying to climb out of her body and warn him, that she was looking at the third stillness: the stillness of the ones who had stopped. Not surrendered — surrender is an act, addressed to someone; this had no address, like the dead's, but it was alive, and it had chosen. Somewhere in the water-hours the wire in them had not snapped but simply been set down. The effort-stillness and its terrible fee — the day-long note, the nightly counting, the arm's length not reached across — some accounting in them had concluded, without drama, that the fee exceeded the goods, and they had gone still in a new way: a stillness with the striving removed and the life not yet, a stillness that had resigned from the future while still breathing in the present. The marsh had a phrase for them by June, spoken at the night surfacings in the tone reserved for weather: so-and-so is sitting up. Everyone understood. Nobody argued with them — the fifth rule held; the night received everyone without questions — and some were talked back down into the water by a mother's voice or a child's need, and stayed down, and some sat up again days later, and the ones who sat up were always, always gone by the next night's count.

The man in the shallows was found in the middle of the afternoon. She did not watch; the discipline forbade nothing, but the body refused; she lay with her eyes on the underside of the papyrus and listened to the grammar of it — the broken rhythm, the one-syllable shout, the convergence — and noted, with the sorting part of her mind that would not stop even now, the missing clause: no voice of the found. He gave the day nothing, not even his fear. The work sounds resumed at the walking rhythm.

That night, in the dark, at the surfacing, Théoneste found her shaking — not weeping; the marsh had rationed weeping out of her by then; just shaking, like the string, finally, after the note — and he sat in the mud with his hand on her head, and she said it into his

knee, the thing the third stillness had shown her about the other two, the sorter's conclusion, the entry her whole taxonomy had been walking toward:

"They are not three kinds, old father. They are one road." The hiding stillness, the sitting-up stillness, the dead stillness. "We are all on it. The work does not even need to find us. It only needs to keep us still long enough, and we arrive on our own."

Théoneste was quiet for a while, his hand on her head, the frogs holding the night up, the cabaret laughter thin on the ridge.

"Yes," he said at last, because he did not lie, that was the softening he had kept. "It is one road. Now hear the other half, and hold both, because the marsh is not a church and I am not a priest and I will not give you one truth to sleep on when there are two." His hand stayed where it was. "Every road runs two directions, girl. They are counting on you walking it the way they built it. Walk it the other way. Be still past their stillness. Out-still the dead if you must. There is a country at the far end of it in the direction they did not plan" — and here he said the thing she did not understand that night, and would, in the deep weeks, in the water, entirely — "and I have been there, cutting reeds, long before any of this, and it is not death, and it is not sitting up. The water knows the way in. Let it teach you. And come back out when I call you. That is the whole art, and you will learn it now, because the rains" — he looked up, old registrar, at the clear and starry and rainless sky — "the rains are about to betray us."

EIGHT. THE NIGHTS

The marsh's day began at dark. That was the inversion the season built and the body learned: dusk was dawn, the whistles on the ridge were the cock-crow in reverse, and when the last of the day shift's sounds had gone up the slopes, the low country came up out of the water and had its morning.

It came up slowly, and in order — listeners first, the ones nearest the causeways, surfacing to the ears only, reading the dark for a held-back line, for the silent party that had twice stayed past the whistles; then the all-clear passing across the channels in the low

frog-pitched voices; and then the marsh stood up. Hundreds, in her sector alone — mats set aside, bodies rising out of the lying-places, mud-people in the starlight, stretching the day's stillness out of joints one by one, quietly, everything quietly, a nation getting up for work.

The night had offices, and they ran in a sequence as fixed as any liturgy. First, water and food: the drinking channels — Théoneste kept the map of which arms of the marsh the dead were not in, redrew it nightly, and the map was life itself, for the water was the only drink and by May the water and the dead were an old married couple — and then the foraging parties out to the marsh's edges, to the abandoned plots of the killed and the fled, digging sweet potatoes and cassava in the dark from fields whose owners lay in the channels, eating the gardens of the dead with the dead's own leave, was how the marsh had settled it; the dead of the marsh were the marsh's, and fed their own. Everything was eaten raw. A fire was a confession; there had been one fire, in the first week, lit by a family new down from the hills, and the barrier men came before midnight, and the marsh did not make that mistake again, and did not judge the family, who were in the water now with everyone else's.

Then the count. This was the center of the night, the office everything else arranged itself around: the census, channel by channel, taken in whispers at the gathering places — who surfaced tonight, who did not, who was heard found in the working hours and where, who is wounded, who is sitting up. Names, all of it names; the marsh kept no numbers; numbers were the hill's instrument, the radio's, the lists'; the marsh counted in names or not at all. Vestine, the sorter, became one of the count's keepers without ever being appointed — her memory was the dry ledger the water could not have — and she carried by June some hundreds of entries, the living and the subtracted, in the order of their nights, and she understood one evening, mid-count, with the small cold shock of recognizing one's own inheritance, that she had become the thing her season required exactly as Sohrab had been his and Danylo his: the low clerk of an unrecorded country, keeping in her

body the register the daylight world was working to make sure would never exist.

And then, until the east went grey, the marsh lived. It is the part she tells last, always, and the part the notebooks trust least, and she has stopped caring: in the middle of the extermination, in the mud, among the floating dead, the low country had a life and defended it. Mothers reweave the day's mud into the children's hair and made it a game and the game had rules and the children enforced them gravely. Marriages were arranged — two, that season, in her sector; the words said in whispers, witnesses standing in black water to the waist; the marsh's position, argued by no one because no one argued with it, being that the family tree does not stop its business for the axe. A man who had been a catechist said the prayers for the subtracted each night at the count's end, the same few sentences, and the marsh said the amens in a breath-whisper that moved across the water like wind coming, and Chance — six years old, ancient, her mud rewoven, an arm's length from Vestine all night every night as if to spend against the daylight's separation — Chance asked him once, in the tone of a person confirming an administrative detail, whether the people in the water could hear the prayers better than God, being nearer, and the catechist, a serious man, considered it seriously, and said yes.

Last office of all, before the grey: the return. Back along the channels to the lying-places, the mats drawn over, the mud renewed, the child settled an arm too far away — and this, the daily descent, was the night's one unbearable seam, worse than hunger, worse than the count's subtractions, the moment the doctrine cost what it cost: to be a person all night and then, on a schedule, to put the person off. To lower the body into the tea-colored water and consent, again, to be nothing until dusk. She watched the marsh do it around her every dawn — hundreds of separate acts of self-burial, conducted in silence, the mats coming down over the lying-places like lids over dishes at the end of a feast, the low country interring itself alive by its own hand, daily, in order to be there to rise again at dark.

You are still there, the greeting had said, all those mornings, on the drowned hill of the old world.

The marsh had amended it. Descending, each dawn, into the water beside the dead and the not-yet-dead, the whole nation of the mud said it the new way, silently, to itself and to the day: not yet found. Not yet found. Not yet found.

INTERLUDE II. THE HOUR OF THE LISTS

13:31. Music fading under. “—and that was for the wedding in Kibungo, the family wishes you sons. Now, my cousins, sit close. It is the hour of the lists, and today the lists are good.”

13:32. “The family thanks its friends. You know that your radio cannot be everywhere, but the family is everywhere, and the family writes letters. So.” Paper, audibly squared on the table. He does this. He lets you hear the paper. “The sector of the lake road, first. A serious person there informs us that the accountant Callixte, the tall one from the coffee cooperative — you know him, cousins, he counted your money for years, count him now — Callixte was seen crossing toward the papyrus at the old ford, on Thursday, at dusk, with two others. The papyrus at the old ford, my cousins of the lake road. Thursday. Dusk. Your radio merely repeats what the family already knows.”

13:34. “Item. In the sector of the two hills, the family asks after the household of the late Sylvère, the radio repairman — a Tutsi household, inscribed, and the work there was completed correctly on the Thursday as scheduled, except.” The smallest pause. A man checking a sum. “Except, my cousins, arithmetic. The household counted five. The work received three. There is a sister, cousins. Vestine, the sister is called, a seller of beans at the crossroads — a tall one, you have bought from her, you know the face. And there was a child staying, the sister’s sister’s girl. A sister and a child, my cousins of the two hills, and the church accounts do not contain them, and the barriers do not contain them, and so your radio asks the simple question your grandmother would ask: if they are not on the hill, and not on the roads, and not in the church” — the smile arriving into the voice, audible, gentle, like sun through mist —

“then are they not perhaps lying down somewhere? Somewhere low? Cousins. The marshes below the two hills. A tall girl and a small girl. The family does not forget its arithmetic. Correct this sum.”

13:37. “And to the two themselves — because the family knows you are listening; everyone listens to the family, it is the only radio left with music —” and here the voice does the thing that the transcripts, read afterward in the courtrooms of the cold countries, could never make the judges feel, the thing you had to receive lying in tea-colored water an arm too far from a sleeping child to know for what it was: it warms. It comes all the way down to the fireside register, the uncle at the evening hearth, the voice of every kindness the old hill ever spoke. “Little cousins. You are tired. You are wet. You are eating raw roots in the dark like animals, you, people of a good household. Come up out of there. The work is nearly finished, the anger is used up, no one has a grudge anymore against a girl and a child. There is milk at the commune office. There is a roof. Ask anyone at the barriers to bring you; tell them the Cousin himself invited you; they will laugh and be kind. Come up, little cousins. The family is waiting for you.”

13:39. “Now — music! Enough seriousness. This next one is an old one, your mothers danced to it—”

13:39. In the water below the two hills, under a mat of woven papyrus, a woman lies with her face in the crown-shadow, the radio arriving small and bright from the ridge where the afternoon line is working, and hears the state of the nation address itself to her by name, and offers it what the marsh has taught her to offer, which is the only reply left in the country and the only one it cannot use: nothing.

III. THE DRY SEASON

NINE. THE CONVOY

Sylvère's little radio had two bands, and the second was the shortwave, and the shortwave was the marsh's window on the outer world — opened for minutes only, at night, at lowest volume, Théoneste's ear and hers against the speaker like two people warming at a coal. It was on the shortwave, across those weeks, that the marsh learned exactly what it was worth to the world, itemized, in the world's own voice.

The soldiers of the nations had been there from the start. That was the fact that took the longest to sit still under: they were already in the country when the plane came down — blue helmets, a force of thousands, sent to mind a peace treaty — and in the first days, while the lists were being worked and the churches filled, the marsh's assumption, the hill's assumption, everyone's assumption ran the old way: the world's soldiers are here; this cannot be allowed to run long. Then the shortwave taught the timetable. Ten of the blue helmets, Belgians, guarding the moderate prime minister, were disarmed, taken, and killed in the first hours — and the lesson of the ten was learned in every capital at speed: within days the news was not reinforcement, it was arithmetic going down. Nations recalling their contingents. The force cut from thousands to hundreds by the vote of a council on the far side of the world — cut, the shortwave said in its even foreign voice, while the killing ran at its highest, to a remnant with orders that fit in one line: do not intervene. Guard what you guard. Do not use your weapons to stop what you were sent to prevent seeing.

And in the same days — this the marsh had not needed the radio for; this the marsh's own foragers had seen with their eyes from the treelines on the road to the capital's highway — the whites had come for the whites.

The convoys ran for most of a week. Foreign soldiers, come in fresh — French, Belgian, Italian, landed at the airport with efficiency nobody had budgeted for the dying — running lorries and jeeps out along the main roads, through the barriers, which opened for them like gates at a wedding, gathering the foreigners of the country: the embassy people, the aid people, the teachers, the priests of the

paler orders, the families, the luggage. The luggage. A forager from the northern channels, an unexcitable man, a mason, reported it at the count in the flat voice the marsh saved for the things past decorating: he had lain in the brush at the junction and watched a lorry stop while soldiers loaded the crated dog of an embassy household, and around the lorry at a distance stood the Tutsi staff of the same household — the cook, the gardener, the woman who minded the children — standing with their hands at their sides in the specific stillness Vestine could have classified for him, asking, and being not so much refused as unheard, because the manifest was the manifest, and the manifest said nationals; and the lorry pulled out with the dog and left the household standing at the junction in full view of the barrier it would not survive the week.

The marsh received the report in silence, and Théoneste said the only thing that was ever said in the low country on the subject, the sentence that closed the file: “Now we know the price of a person here. It is below a dog, if the dog has papers.”

But it was the shortwave that delivered the finding the season required of her personally — her clerk’s finding, the one entry in the world’s ledger she was positioned, lying in the mud with her ear on the coal, to audit better than any minister alive. The foreign voices had a strange trouble, those weeks, with one word. Correspondents in the field used it plainly: the word the lawyers built, the word Sylvère had taken apart in the dark. But the official voices — the councils, the ministries, the spokesmen of the greatest nations — performed, night after night, on the record, a labor of avoidance so strenuous she could hear the sweat in it: acts of genocide may have occurred, one said, and would not be moved to the noun. Chaotic ethnic violence. Ancient tribal hatreds. Both sides. She lay in the marsh that was being probed daily on a schedule announced by radio, and listened to the mightiest governments of the earth declining the one noun in their dictionaries that carried a duty — because the word, once said, activated a signed convention; the word had teeth in it that the speakers’ own grandfathers had installed, after the last time, precisely so that no future speaker could say it and stand still; and so the speakers, needing to stand still, worked around the word the

way the day shift worked around the deep channels: it was not that they could not reach it. It was that they knew exactly what lived there.

She understood then — under the mat, in the tea-colored water, in the seventh week of working hours — the symmetry that is her contribution to the shortwave's archive, the audit no commission ever printed. The Cousin would not stop talking, and the councils would not start; the radio on the ridge produced words without limit to make the thing happen, and the radios of the world withheld one word to avoid having to stop it; and between the two — between the voice that said everything and the voices that would not say the thing — lay the marsh, which said nothing, which was the only silence in the whole arrangement that had not been chosen.

Three silences, she told Théoneste at the surfacing. Ours, the dead's, and the world's. And only the world's was voluntary.

The old man thought about it, mud to the thigh in the starlight, the cabaret laughter thin on the ridge, the frogs holding up the sky.

"Then the world is the third stillness," he said. "Sitting up in the shallows, hands in its lap, watching the line come on." He took up his hoe. "Well. We know how that one ends. Let us go and be the first kind a while longer."

TEN. THE STILLNESS

Somewhere in the eighth week the days stopped being days.

She can put no date on it, because dates were the first cargo the water took. Time in the lying-place had always been slow; now it came off its spool entirely. The working hours had a shape once — morning probes east, the noon lull, the afternoon lines — and she had told the hours by it like a farmwife telling them by shadows. Then, one day or some days, without event, the shape stopped arriving in sequence and began arriving all at once, the whole day present together in the water like leaves in tea, morning and noon and dusk steeping in each other, and she lay inside the day rather than along it, and could no more have said what hour it was than a

stone in the channel could, and noticed — this was the first mercy, and mercy is the noir of that season, mercy came only in disguises — that a creature outside sequence cannot wait. Waiting had been the wire, the whole day-long note of the first stillness, the expensive singing. The waiting was gone. Not endured: gone, dissolved with the hours that were its instrument. Something in her had stopped standing in line for the future, and the relief of it was so vast and so wrong that she wept, if she wept — the face was underwater to the mouth; the marsh kept even that ambiguous.

Then the edges went.

It happened first at the skin, which was logical, the skin being where she ended, and where she ended was exactly the property the day shift was hunting: a boundary, a difference, an edge of person against water for a probe to find. The water was body temperature by afternoon. Lie motionless long enough in water the exact heat of blood and the skin gives up its casting vote; there comes an hour when she could not have said, without moving — and she could not move — where the inside stopped. The bath and the bathed went over into each other. Her weight was the water's; her small ceaseless swaying was the channel's own slow decision; the pulse she heard was in her ears or was the marsh's insect drone or was the same thing counted twice. She lay in the lying-place like a word on a tongue not yet said, and the water went on gently insisting, all day, every day, on its one idea, the idea Théoneste had assigned her like a catechism — be what the water is — until the idea stopped being an instruction and became a fact with her inside it.

What remained, when the hours had steeped together and the skin had abstained, was the listening.

She wants this part exact, because it is the country the old man promised, and she is the only witness the notebooks will ever get who went in and came back on schedule: the listening was not hers. That is the whole of it, and there is no way to say it that does not sound like the mind breaking, and it was the opposite of the mind breaking. All her life she had listened the way everyone listens — a self at a window, sorting the street for what concerned it. In the

deep weeks the self left the window, and the listening stayed, and widened, and had no address. Sound stopped arriving to her and simply arrived — the probe-rhythm two channels east, the papyrus stirring its million dry hinges, a moorhen's foot-splash, the frogs' vast pedal-note, the specific silence of a heron standing, the Cousin's voice from the ridge gone small and strange and stripped of aim — all of it entering an attention with no one at the center of it, the way rain enters the marsh: everywhere, without a target, received entire. And in that condition — she will say it plainly and the reader may do with it what the reader can — in that condition there was no fear. Not courage; courage is a self holding; this was the floor under fear removed. Terror, she understood from inside it, is addressed mail. It requires a recipient, a person-shaped place for the future to land on. The water had taken the future and blurred the recipient, and the terror-letters from the working day arrived and arrived and found the address dissolved, and lay on the surface with the light, unopened. The probe-line would work toward her lying-place — the blunt swallowed question, nearer, nearer — and the body's old alarms would rise partway like bubbles and open into nothing, because there was no longer a difference in the water for the fear to defend. She was the thing being searched for, and she was the medium being searched, and of the two only the medium remained on duty, and the medium was calm, the medium had been doing this since before people, the medium did not read lists and could not be preached to.

This is where the visions lived, if visions is the word — at that depth, in the wide unowned listening, in the hours steeped together. They did not come like dreams, gated by sleep; the gate was gone with the rest of the architecture; they came like weather, in daylight, with her eyes open on the underside of the crown. Her mother came, not as a figure but as a smell of ironing and a pressure at the hair, and stayed an hour or a second, plaiting mud into her braids with fingers indistinguishable from the current. Sylvère came as the heat of a radio's back, as solder-smoke, as a voice saying we know these people in a tone that had shed its wrongness and become simply true, become the count itself: knowing these people was now her office; she carried hundreds of

them in the wet dark. The church came, some days — the marsh did not censor; the blue and yellow window assembled itself on the underside of the papyrus and the noise of the ending world ran through her without walls to echo in, and this was the state's most terrible gift and she gives it to the notebooks exactly: even that, even the church, arrived at last as weather. Not softened. Not healed. Received — the way the marsh received everything, the rain and the blood and the radio and the dead, holding all of it in the same wide unresisting water, refusing only one thing, which was to be moved.

And she felt it, in the deepest hours — she has never said this to anyone but the old man, and he only nodded — she felt the pull at the bottom of the country. Because the wide listening was shaped like something. The absence of the person at the window was shaped like something. An arm's length away — always that distance, the doctrine's own distance — lay her daylight neighbors the dead, who had mastered in one stroke what she was learning by the week: the perfect address-less stillness, the total resignation from sequence, the final fluency in water. The road is one road; she had said it herself in the fourth week, shaking against the old man's knee. Down at the bottom of the stillness you could feel the grade of the road, feel how little was left of the difference, how the last membrane between the first stillness and the last was thin as the skin's abstained vote — and feel, this is the confession, the entry she makes and does not cross out, how restful the last few steps looked from there. The third ones, the sitting-up ones, had not been mad. She understood them at the bottom the way you understand a sentence in your own language. They had simply kept walking to the end of a road whose beginning was survival, and the road did not announce where it stopped being the one and became the other, and no signpost in the whole flooded country marked the border.

What kept her — and this is the finding, this is what the chapter of the deep weeks is for — was not the will. The will was steeped tea by then, an ingredient, not an agent. What kept her was smaller and older and it came from outside: it was the call.

Every dusk, across the settling dark, in the frog-pitch below the day's frequencies, the old man's voice: the two soft clicks of the tongue, the sound he used for her channel, the sound that meant surface now, you are called. And every dusk — this is the mechanism she brought back from the bottom for the notebooks that will never know what to do with it — the call came into the wide unowned listening and did what nothing else in the drowned world could do: it addressed her. It re-created the address in the act of writing to it. Somewhere in the medium a recipient reassembled — reluctantly, the way cold limbs reassemble around a fire — because a particular sound had crossed the marsh meaning one thing meaning her, and the meaning stood her self back up out of the water like a mat lifted from a lying-place, and she rose at dark, every dark, dripping, person-shaped, still there, because she was expected. Not because she chose. Choice lived up in the shallows with the hours and the skin. At the depth she wintered at, there was only this: the water saying nothing is separate, and the small tongue-click of another creature saying: you are. Come and be counted.

That is the stillness, the whole of it, the country at the far end that is not death and is not sitting up, and the toll-house on its border where everything is taken except what someone else calls you. The vigil is the technology, a man learned in another marsh in another decade of the world's attention; the drug is only the fuel. Here the marsh was the drug and the stillness was the crossing and the old man's clicked tongue was the whole vigil, the fire kept, the count kept, the thread paid out and pulled, dusk upon dusk upon dusk. She went down each dawn a little further than the dawn before. She came back each dusk because she was called. On the day the calling stopped — and the dry season was walking toward that day at its own fixed pace, drying the marsh from the edges in like a lid closing — she did not know, she tells the notebooks, lying, in the flat register, because this one entry she will not read aloud: she knew exactly. Everyone at the bottom knows exactly. Without the call there is no border, and the water is very patient, and the road is one road.

ELEVEN. THE QUARREL OF THE MARSH

She told the old man about the bottom of the country on a moonless night in the ninth week, at the far gathering place where the count was finished early, because the entry would not keep any longer — the pull, the thin membrane, the restfulness of the last few steps — and she told it the way the marsh had taught her to tell everything, flat, complete, without decoration, and Théoneste listened with his hands on his hoe like a man at a rail, and when she finished he did not console her, because consolation was decoration, and they had their quarrel instead, the one the whole book of that season was written to hold, from full dark to the first grey, in whispers, in black water to the waist.

“Say your side first,” he said. “You have been carrying it since the church. Put it down where I can look at it.”

“Then here it is, old father. The stillness is theirs.” She heard her own voice find the counter register, the level one, the clerk’s. “Walk it through with me and stop me where I am wrong. What did they want — before the machetes, under the machetes, the thing the machetes were for? The radio said it every morning for a year: that we should not exist. Not die, exactly — dying is only the tool. Not exist. Not be found in the country, not be met on the paths, not answer when the hill says muraho. That was the whole project: our absence, total, root and seed. And now look at what the marsh has made of me, and tell me whose work it completes. I lie ten hours a day practicing my own absence. I have unlearned the hours. I have unlearned my edges. I lay yesterday in the water and could not find the place where I stopped — and I was glad, old father, that is the part that keeps me from sleep: I was glad, it was mercy, it was the first mercy in nine weeks. They wanted a country with no me in it, and I have built one, in here, and I go down into it every dawn by my own hand, and it is the only place I am safe, and do you see the shape of that? The genocide could stop tomorrow and it would keep me. It has moved inside. It no longer needs the day shift; I perform the erasure myself, at dawn, free of charge, and the deepest part of me has started to prefer it. What survives this marsh, if anything survives it — will it be a person, old father? Or will it be a stillness

wearing my name, a country with no one in it, walking up the hill in my dress? Because if that is what walks out, then they did not miss me. They got me. They got me in the one place the machete could never have reached, and I handed them the blade.”

The frogs held the long pause up. The old man moved his hoe once in the water, slowly, like a ferryman.

“That is well argued,” he said at last. “You argue like your brother repaired radios — nothing left loose. Now I will not tell you that you are wrong, because you are not wrong, and the marsh does not lie at night; that is the fifth rule wearing its other face. Every word you said is true. Here is what you have not said, and it is also true, and you will hold both, because I am too old to sell you one truth on a night this dark.

“You say the stillness is theirs — that you are practicing your own absence. Girl. I was going down into that water forty years before the radio learned your name. Every trade that works the marsh knows the country you found: the trap-setter knows it, waiting out a fish; the reed-cutter knows it, when the rhythm of the blade takes the cutter and there is only cutting; my grandmother knew it, and she called it *kwiyumvira mu mazi*, hearing oneself in the water, and she did not learn it from any radio, and no one was hunting her. What you found at the bottom is not their invention. It is the oldest room in the person — the room from before the person, from before the hill had names on it. Prayer has tried to reach that room since prayer began; the drummers reach for it; the fast reaches for it; the ones who whirl, in the countries north of here, reach for it turning. Every path to God the world has cut is a path toward the wide listening with no one at the window — and you were driven there, yes, at the point of the machete, down the worst road ever built to it. But hear the distinction, because the whole quarrel lives in it: they built the road. They did not build the room. The room was always there. It does not belong to them because they drove you into it, any more than the marsh belongs to them because they made it a hiding place. They have never even seen the room. Men who need a radio talking in their heads all day to keep the work going — those men could not survive one hour of the room; the

silence would eat them like acid eats the tester's stone. That is why the radio never stops, girl. Have you understood that yet? The voice on the ridge, all day, every day, the birthdays, the lists, the courage-my-cousins — that is not their strength. That is their terror of the very country you winter in. They cannot be alone with one minute of what you live in ten hours a day. So who owns the stillness — the ones who flee it with a transistor, or the one who walks in it and comes back at a call?"

"Comes back," she said. "Tonight. And when the call stops?"

"Then we come to the true quarrel," the old man said, "which was never about them at all. You are afraid the stillness is the genocide moved inside. I say the stillness is a room, and rooms are innocent; and you say: but the door, old father, the door opens onto the last stillness, I have felt the grade of the road; and there we are both standing at the bottom of the marsh with one fact between us, and the fact is this: every door out of the person opens toward death. Every one. That is not the room's flaw; that is its location. The fathers of every faith found the same architecture — go far enough into the silence and you stand at the border of not being, because that is where the silence is kept; and they did not turn back from the room for that reason; they set a rule instead, and the rule is the oldest one in the whole science, older than the fifth rule, older than the marsh: no one goes in alone. The fast is kept in a brotherhood. The whirling has a sheikh who claps the turn to an end. The trance has the drum, and the drum has hands, and the hands belong to someone who stays outside and keeps the time. It is not the going-in that decides what you are, girl. Saints and suicides go in by the same door. It is whether anything calls you out. The genocide's whole design — now stop me where I am wrong, since that is our method tonight — the design was to cut every voice that could ever call you: the household, root and seed; the neighbors; the church; the world's councils sitting on their hands over the water. Kill the tree so that no one is left to say the name. A person no one calls is a person the room keeps. That is what they understood — it is the only deep thing they understood — and it is why the work went first through the families, and it is why an old cutter of reeds stands in this water every dusk clicking his tongue

like a fool at the frogs. Not because you cannot swim in the country. Because you must not swim in it uncalled." He lifted the hoe and set it down again, the ferryman's stroke. "So. Hold both, as promised. Your side: the stillness can finish their work, and the border has no signpost, and the deepest part of you has started to prefer the water; true, all of it; write it in your count. My side: the room is older than them and cleaner than them and it is the reason you are alive, and it will be, if you let it, the reason you can live afterward — a place in you the hill can never burn, because it has no address. Both true. The beam does not settle; the beam will never settle; you will carry the two pans up out of this marsh and they will weigh against each other for the rest of your life. Only remember which side of the quarrel I gave my nights to." The east was going grey through the papyrus; the whistles would come with the light; all across the low country the mats were beginning to descend over the lying-places. "I called you every dusk of this season, girl. Whatever the stillness is — theirs, God's, the water's, nobody's — I put my one voice against the whole of it, every night, on the side that says you are. When it is your turn to hold the count for someone" — he took up his hoe, mud to the thigh, old ferryman of the unread country, and turned toward his own lying-place, and said it over his shoulder, the whole doctrine, the book's last honest sentence before the dry season came to collect — "call loudly. The water is very patient. Be more patient than the water, and louder than the radio, and still there at the end. It is the entire art. There is no other."

TWELVE. THE CUTTING OF THE RAINS

The long rains ended in the middle of May, on schedule, the way they had ended every year of every life on the hill, and the season changed sides.

It was not sudden; that was its cruelty; it was punctual. The rain that had walked up the valley every afternoon of the marsh's terrible spring — the rain that filled the channels and raised the water over the lying-places and drummed on the papyrus so hard that whole shifts of probing were called off, the hunted lying beneath the loud roof of it in the only safety the season ever issued

free — the rain simply kept its own calendar, and one week it thinned, and the next it stopped, and the sky went to the high scrubbed blue of the dry months, itumba giving way to icyi as it had for the grandmothers and their grandmothers, and everyone in the water understood the astronomy of it at once, because Théoneste had said it in the fourth week and the Cousin had said it on the air in the first: nobody has ever had to fetch the dry season.

The marsh began to hand its people over. That is the plain mechanics of June, and she watched it the way you watch a tide you are standing in: the water fell a hand's width, then another; the tea-colored depth over the lying-places thinned toward broth; channels that had been neck-deep went to the waist, to the knee; the floating mats grounded and stopped floating and became simply roofs, liftable; and the marsh's margins — the whole soft ambiguous frontier of flooded grass where the low country had shaded gradually into the hill's — dried, and firmed, and became ground a man could walk in boots, and the working day walked in on it. Every week the searchable marsh grew and the unsearchable heart of it shrank, the deep channels pulling in their borders like a garment pulled in at the shoulders, and the whole hidden nation contracted with it, channel by channel, into a smaller and smaller and better-known country, so that the count at night now recorded not only the subtracted but the geography itself going: the north arm is dry, the ford channels are dry, do not lie east of the dead palm anymore, there is no east of the dead palm anymore. The season was doing to the marsh, hectare by hectare, exactly what the machetes had done to the hill: reducing the places where a person could be, on a schedule, toward zero. They had told the truth on the radio all along. The dry season was on the lists. It had been coming every year since the world began, and this year it was coming as personnel.

And with the falling water came the intimate hunt.

Évariste appeared at the marsh edge in the first week of June, in the amber hour after the whistles, when the day shift had gone up and the dark had not come down, and he called her name.

Not the Cousin's way, to the sector, to the family — her name, across the water, in his own voice, the voice from the junction, with the little music still in it, terribly, indestructibly, the lift on the second syllable now landing on Ves-ti-ne. He stood on the new dry ground at the papyrus line — she could see him through the crown of her mat, a silhouette with a machete slung and his hands cupped, unhurried, patient as a man calling cattle in — and he explained himself to the marsh at large, evening after evening, reasonably, in the tone of a man settling a boundary dispute among neighbors, which, she understood, lying in the thinning water with her heart kneeling, is exactly what he believed himself to be.

"Vestine. I know you can hear me. The marsh is small now; everyone knows where everyone lies; do not be childish." A pause; the frogs; the amber light going down. "I want to say it while it is still between us, before the last sweeps, because the sweeps will not be personal, and I am." Another evening: "Your household was mine to complete. That is not a boast, it is the register — each man answered for his neighboring plots; you know how the work was distributed; you saw the barriers. Your house was on my list, Vestine, and your house is open at the bottom, like a sum with a figure missing, and the figure is walking around in my marsh. I cannot close my season while you are wet. You understand accounts; your family always paid on time; I say this with respect. Come up and let me finish the arithmetic." And once — this was the evening she stopped relaying his words to the count, because the count had begun to look at her strangely, as if the words were a wound one should not keep showing — once, in the full old warmth, with the machete hanging from his shoulder like a farm tool at the end of a market day: "Little sister. Do you remember the roofing nails? The last morning, at the junction, under my umbrella — we spoke about the price of roofing nails, and you laughed at me for buying dear. I think about that morning. I am not a cruel man, Vestine; you know I am not; you have known me ten years. Nothing that has happened here was cruelty. It was the season, and the season is nearly over, and I only want my field clean like everyone else's. Come out, and I will do it myself, quickly, with respect, as between neighbors — and I will say the prayers after, since your

catechist is in the water. You will not get that from the sweeps. The sweeps are boys from other hills. They do not know you. I know you." The silhouette standing in the amber light, hands cupped, the greeting gone all the way to the end of itself: you are still there. I know you are still there. Be still there for me.

She lay under the mat an arm's length from the child and received it the way the deep weeks had taught her to receive everything, letting it arrive and lie on the surface unopened — and found that one letter opened itself regardless, not the threats, not the arithmetic, but the roofing nails; the roofing nails went through the wide listening and found the old address as if it had never dissolved, because it was posted from the old world, in the old handwriting, and she understood then the final fact about the intimate hunt, the fact that made it worse than the sweeps, worse than the radio, the fact she entered in the count under his name in her own flat hand: the neighbor does not hunt you with the machete. The machete is for the end. The neighbor hunts you with the greeting — with the ten years, the junction, the umbrella, the stretcher-pole at your mother's funeral, every shared morning turned around and pointed — because he knows the one thing the boys from the other hills can never know: your name in his mouth is the only bait the bottom of the marsh still rises to. The genocide's last tool, when the water is low and the lists are nearly closed, is the intimacy itself. He was not calling to a hiding place. He was calling to a person, and he knew it, and that was the weapon: every evening he stood on the dry ground and worked to make her be someone — addressed, particular, known, still there — because a someone can be finished, and a stillness cannot.

The marsh's answer she gave him nightly, with the water falling around her a hand's width a week: nothing. But she wrote the finding in the count, for the notebooks, for the courts on the grass that were years downstream, for whoever would one day need the mechanics of it stated by a clerk who lay inside the machine while it ran:

They greet you for ten years. Then they kill your family on a schedule. Then they stand at the edge of the water calling your

name in the old voice, needing you to answer — because the last thing the genocide requires of you, the very last item on its list, is that you agree to still be someone. Refuse, and the season has to come in and get you. Make it come in. Make it wade. Give the day nothing, give the amber hour less, and if you must be no one to do it — the two pans, old father, I am holding both — then be no one with your hand an arm's length from the child, and be called back at dark, and let the account stay open until the rains return, or the front arrives, whichever the ledger of this world sends first.

INTERLUDE III. THE STORM COMMUNIQUÉS

5:58. No music at the top of the hour. This has never happened before. The Cousin's voice arrives already talking, as if the door of the studio had been opened on a man mid-sentence, and the warmth is still there but it has a pulse in it now, a walking pace gone to a trot.

5:59. “—so the family will have heard the guns in the night, the ones in the east, and the family will not be alarmed, because the family knows its strength. But I will speak plainly this morning, my cousins, plainly, as at a bedside. The inyenzi army is moving. The cold ones from over the border, the ones who started all this — they are on the roads, my cousins, they have taken towns in the east, and they are coming with their lists too. Ask yourself what is on their lists. Every cousin who did his duty is on their lists. So understand the hour: this is no longer only work. This is the harvest with rain coming. What is standing in the field when the storm arrives is lost — to us, my cousins, lost to us.”

6:03. “Therefore. Communiqués, and they are short today. One: the marshes. My cousins of the wet sectors, the water is low, the good God has drained the hiding places, and still I am told there are sectors where the papyrus has not been finished. Finish it. This week. Do not sort, do not question, do not send them to the commune — the commune offices are needed for other things now. Where you find, conclude. Two: the pits. A serious person reminds the family that work left in the open testifies. You understand me, cousins; I will not draw pictures on the family radio; the field must

be clean and it must also look clean. Three—" and here the paper is squared on the table, twice, three times, a small dry drumming, the hands' pulse getting into the props — "three. The family is hearing ugly words from the foreign radios. The lawyers' word. My cousins, prepare your tongues now, as you would prepare a roof before rain, because the words will come to your own villages one day, with notebooks: there was a war. Say it after me, the family together: there was a war. The plane was brought down; the cold ones invaded; there was fighting, there was confusion, there were deaths on all sides — on all sides, my cousins, keep those four words dry and close, they will roof your house for thirty years. Nobody organized anything. There were no lists. Angry people grieved their President, and grief has no chief. If a notebook asks you about the barriers: the barriers were for security, everyone stood at them, it was communal work. If it asks about your radio—" the smallest pause, and inside it, for one second, audible to a woman lying in six inches of water with her whole taxonomy awake, the sound of a man looking at his own instrument — "your radio played music, my cousins. You remember the music. We had such music."

6:09. "Petrol. The family asks about petrol; the family is told: the vehicles of the authorities have priority on the western road. Cousins with vehicles will understand. The western road, my cousins. Keep it clear for the authorities."

6:10. "And now — because your radio keeps its promises even in the storm — music." A hiss of tape. The rumba from the New Year, the bright guitars, the one that was everyone's favorite, and something has happened to it, or to the morning it plays into, or to the country between the transmitter and the reeds: it is the same song entire and it arrives like a thing found in the pocket of the drowned. It plays out whole. He lets the last chord finish, because he is a professional.

6:14. "Stay with the family, my cousins. The family is strong. The family will be back after these—"

6:14. And under it, below the frequency of it, in the shrinking water east of the dead palm, the marsh does its own communiqué at first

light, mat by mat, in the oldest code on the hill, the two soft clicks of a tongue: you are. Come and be counted. The guns in the east say the rest.

IV. THE STILL ONES

THIRTEEN. THE HUNDREDTH DAY

The last sweep came at the end of June, and it was everything the season had learned about them, brought at once: the biggest line, the earliest start, boys from other hills and men from their own, and the silent party in among them — and it came for the heart of the marsh, the last deep water, the small final country east of nothing where the whole remaining nation now lay shoulder to shoulder because there was nowhere else to be a stranger in.

She does not narrate the last sweep in order, because it did not happen to her in order; it happened the way the deep weeks had taught the world to happen, all at once, steeping; and the count she rebuilt afterward, at night, for years, has it thus. The line worked from the dry margins in. The probing ran from the morning whistles to past the usual dusk — the schedule itself broke that day; they knew about the guns in the east; the working hours had rain coming. The water over the lying-places was a hand's depth where it was anything. And the marsh's last doctrine, never taught, arrived on its own in the oldest heads: Théoneste surfaced in the worst of the afternoon, in the open, two channels west of the deep country — upright, visible, unhurried, an old man wading with a hoe as if going to his traps, in plain working daylight — and the line saw him, as he intended, and turned, as he intended, and she lay with her face in the crown-shadow and her hand one arm's length from the child and listened to the sounds of the day shift converging on the one man in the marsh who had never once in a hundred days been findable, and was findable now, at his own hour, on his own ground, by his own act, walking a probe-line away from the deep water where the children lay.

The grammar of the finding she knew by heart. The broken rhythm. The one-syllable shout with the lift in it. The convergence, many feet through shallow water, fast. And then the clause the grammar had never once contained in a hundred days, the clause that was his last entry in the register of the low country, and she wants it in the book exactly, because it is the only sentence of the whole season that the season did not write: out of the converged circle, in the old man's voice, pitched not under the frogs this time but over

the whole marsh, clear, unhurried, in the tone of a man calling cattle home at dark — two clicks of the tongue. Loud. Twice.

You are. Come and be counted. Said to the deep water, over the heads of the line that held him. Said as the blades came down. The whole art, performed once in the open, at the full price, so that every lying-place in the last country would hear the call one more time and hold.

The marsh held. The line, satisfied, spent, hearing the guns now themselves, did not reach the deep water before dark. The count that night was taken in a silence below the fifth rule, and her voice did the naming, because the office was hers now — the clicks were hers now — and the last name on the hundredth night's list was his, entered in the flat register, the way he would have entered weather: Théoneste, cutter of papyrus, taken in the open, west of the deep water, at his own hour. The road he walked ran two directions. He walked it the other way.

And then the morning came when the sound was different.

She has tried many times to say the difference for the notebooks. It was not silence; the marsh was never silent; it was that the sounds arrived unaccompanied — frogs, moorhens, the papyrus hinges, the wind's slow reading of the reeds — with nothing underneath them. No whistles. No assembly on the ridge. No radio. The working day did not come down the slope, and did not come down the slope, and the sun stood higher than the schedule had ever permitted, and the marsh lay in the shallows under its mats, unable to trust the first day off in a hundred, until, near noon, there were voices on the causeway — and the voices were wrong in the right way: accented, northern, the Kinyarwanda of people raised over the border, the cold ones, the ones the radio had promised as devils for a year — calling into the reeds, formally, over and over, a sentence none of the season's taxonomies had a kind for:

It is finished. We are the front. Come out. It is finished.

The emergence took days, and she gives it plainly, because it is the part the world's imagination gets most wrong: nobody ran out. The marsh came out the way blood comes back into a sleeping limb —

slowly, in pain, in pins and needles of trust. Figures rose from the mats and stood in the channels, swaying, mud-black, blinking, and could not walk on the open causeway when they were led to it; the legs had unlearned openness; people went down on all fours on dry level ground, or sat abruptly in the road, not from weakness — from exposure, from the roof being gone, from a sky with nothing between them and it. Eyes that had lived a season in crown-shadow wept in the plain light and could not stop; soldiers of the front stood in the road with tins of milk and watched a nation of the mud learn to stand upright in the open like one-year-olds, hands out, falling, held. She came up the causeway on the third day with Chance's hand in hers — the child walked better than any of them; the child had been ahead in the only subject all season — and at the top, on the dry ground where the amber-hour silhouette had stood calling her name, she turned and looked back at the low country, the shrunken glittering water, the papyrus standing in its millions with its back to her at last, the whole drowned university of the stillness, and performed, upright, in the open, in her own name, the office that was hers now and would be hers for life.

Two clicks of the tongue. Loud. For the ones still under the mats deciding. For the ones who never would. For the register.

Still here, said the woman the marsh gave back. Not yet found. Still here.

INTERLUDE IV. OFF AIR

11:52. The signal is moving. The family does not know this, but the marsh's little shortwave, and every set left on the hills, can hear it in the sound itself: the broadcast has wheels under it now — a generator's whine below the voice, the acoustics of a van, the transmitter running west on the road it told the cousins to keep clear.

11:53. "—the family will forgive the quality of the signal. Your radio is undergoing maintenance. Temporary, my cousins, temporary. The family's voice does not stop; the family's voice is only traveling." Something heavy shifts in the van; papers slide; a second voice says something short and is not answered on air.

“Communiqués. The authorities are regrouping westward in good order — in good order, my cousins, whatever the foreign radios sing. Cousins in the western prefectures will welcome the authorities as family. Cousins with vehicles know what the western road is for. Cousins on foot—” the smallest gap, filled with engine — “cousins on foot will manage. The family has always managed.”

11:56. “And to the cousins staying behind. Listen well, because your radio thinks of everything, even now. The cold ones will come to your hills with their questions and their notebooks. You have your four words; keep them dry. And there is one more thing, the last service your radio will do you today, so hear it, hear it like scripture.” The voice comes down, all the way down, to the fireside register, the bedside register, the last warmth in the pantry, spent entire: “What you remember, my cousins — that is now the whole of the war. Think. The barriers are coming down; the lists are ash on the western road as I speak; the pits, well, the pits were dug by nobody, everyone knows pits. What remains? What remains is only what is said, and what is said comes from what is remembered, and what is remembered, my cousins, is a field like any field: it grows what is planted and it grows what is permitted. So plant carefully, family. Weed daily. Remember the music. Remember that you were afraid, because you were, weren’t you — everyone was afraid, fear has no chief, fear signed nothing. Remember the war, the invasion, the confusion. And the rest — the rest, my cousins, let the rest go where the season goes when it ends. Seasons end. Nobody is guilty of a season. In a year the hills will be green over everything, green does not testify, and when the children ask, the family will say: there was a war, and it was a terrible time, and we survived it together. And that will be the history, because the family will be the ones telling it. The dead, my cousins” — and the engine fills the pause where an audience should be — “the dead tell nothing. That was the entire point.”

11:59. “Music now. The family keeps its promises to the last.” The click of the cassette. The bright guitars of the New Year’s rumba rise — and stagger, mid-phrase, as the generator dips; the song runs slow, a quarter-tone down, the beloved voices dragged deep and wrong, guitars melting like tar in the sun; then the signal lifts a

last time, the song surges bright and whole for three seconds, exactly as it was, the whole old world in it —

12:00. — and the carrier drops.

12:00. Static. Not silence: static, the sound of an empty frequency, the sound of air with nothing organized in it, hissing off every set on every hill and in every ruin from the lake to the border. On a causeway above the marsh a woman stands with a little two-band radio in her hand — her brother's; he repaired these; nothing left loose — and she does not switch it off. She lets the static run a long minute over the water, the first minute in one hundred days in which no voice anywhere is telling the hills what they are, and the marsh answers the empty frequency with its own full one — frogs, wind, the papyrus reading itself — and she stands between the two sounds, the dead air and the living air, and then she thumbs the dial off, and the season, as broadcast, ends.

What is remembered grows what is planted, said the voice, going west. She looks at the water where four hundred names are held in a wet clerk's keeping, hers.

"Yes," she says to the static, aloud, the first sentence of the after. "It does. I remember everything."

FOURTEEN. THE SEASON AFTER

The hill of six hundred was a hill of eighty when the counting could finally be done in the open, and the first assembly of the after was arithmetic: the survivors of the sector standing in the churchless crossroads in the August sun while a soldier of the front with a school notebook took down the names of the living, which required one page.

The dead had no page anywhere, and this was the discovery of the first season of the after, the one the notebooks of the world were not prepared for: a genocide leaves no ledger on the victims' side. The parish registers had burned with the parishes; the households that held the birth-order and the marriages and the debts and the nicknames were themselves the thing destroyed — the family tree was the archive, and the archive was the target, and where it had

stood there was now, administratively, weather. There were no graves to visit; the pits were nobody's and everywhere; the marsh kept its own and did not mark them. So the survivors did the thing the species does when the paper is gone: they made the register out of breath. On the hundredth day of the after, and every year since on the season's return — kwibuka, the word means remember, and it is not a suggestion but the name of the office — the eighty stood at the crossroads and recited. Vestine's voice led, because the count was hers: four hundred names in the order of their nights, the living order, the marsh order, each one a whole entry — Théoneste, cutter of papyrus, taken in the open at his own hour — because the marsh counted in names or not at all, and a name said aloud in the open air by a living mouth was now the entire estate of a family tree, the tomb, the archive, and the deed, all of it, carried in a survivor's wet-season memory and paid out once a year into the sun.

The word came home in that first after-year too — the lawyers' word. The world produced it fluently now, in the past tense, at podiums, where it asked nothing: what had happened in the hills was a genocide, the councils agreed, who had spent the season itself declining the noun; and tribunals were convened in a town over the border, with robes and translation booths, and in time the Cousin himself sat in one, headphones on his grey head, listening to his own broadcasts read back to him at the pace of court stenography, all the warmth transcribed out, only the instructions left — and was sentenced, in the fullness of years, by judges who pronounced his station's name with foreign vowels, for incitement: for the crime of the voice. She followed it on a neighbor's radio. She felt, she says, nothing she could report to the notebooks. The tribunal was necessary and real and as far from the amber hour as the moon; it tried the voice; the hands were another matter, and the hands were a hundred thousand, and the hands came home.

That was the second discovery of the after, the one no other country had ever had to make at such a scale: there were too many killers for any court on earth. A justice built for individuals met a crime committed by a population, and the arithmetic failed in a new direction — the prisons of the whole region could not hold the day

shifts of one province — and so, in the fullness of a decade, the state sent the trials home, to the hills, to the grass. Gacaca, the old word: justice seated on the lawn, the way land disputes and cow debts had been settled time out of mind — the neighbors assembled in the open, the accused standing among the people of his own paths, the survivors as the evidence, no robes, the hillside itself as the court of record. And so it came that on a Tuesday in the after-years, on the grass of the two hills, in the crossroads shade where the market had returned in its thin post-war form, Vestine sat in the assembly and watched Évariste stand up in the middle of his neighbors, home from eleven years in prison, grey through the beard, thinner inside his shirt the way the marsh had once been thinner inside its coats, and confess to the completion of her household, in order, by name, on the Thursday, as scheduled — the confession being the price of the sentence already served — and heard him, at the end, in the formula the grass courts asked of the accused, turn in her direction, the only surviving creditor of that account, and ask.

What she answered is hers, and the book will keep the marsh's fifth rule over it: the night receives everyone without questions, and so will this page. What the record can hold is the after itself, because the after is public and permanent and stranger than any verdict: the state resettled the hills for its own reasons of land and peace, and the reconciliation villages were built with their deliberate arithmetic, and the arrangement of the world became, by policy, what it had been by history — she at the market with beans and the mended sewing machine, and Évariste two stalls down with tomatoes, neighbors again, by government design, the greeting to be renegotiated between them syllable by syllable across the remaining decades. The first year he did not look at her. The third year he nodded, and she did not answer the nod, and both understood the count was running. And in some year of the after — she will not number it — on an ordinary market morning, in the crossroads noise, he said it: muraho. Without the music on the second syllable; the music did not survive the season; a flat plain wary muraho, the word laid down on the counter between them like a coin of a currency that had collapsed and been reissued and was

worth, now, exactly what the two of them together agreed it was worth and not one franc more. You are still there. She looked at the tomatoes, and the grey beard, and the hands. Yes, she said. That was all. It was not forgiveness — the grass court had its word and she keeps hers — and it was not nothing. It was the exchange rate of the after, posted daily, subject to change.

The last page belongs to the water. In the after-years a memorial was raised at the marsh road, and the schoolchildren are brought in the remembering season, and Vestine is one of the ones who speaks, and she has noticed what the children fear: not the numbers, which are weather to them, but the papyrus itself, standing in its millions at their backs. So she ends every year the same way. She walks them down to the edge, to the amber-hour ground, and has them sit, and teaches them the thing the season taught her that the season did not mean to teach — that the stillness is a room and rooms are innocent; that it belonged to the marsh before the machetes and belongs to the marsh after; that a person can go into the quiet by the water because she chooses, for no reason, for rest, and come out when she likes, because the coming-out is the whole art. She sits with them in the sun with the water running its old unread country out to the horizon, the last honest thing in the prefecture, keeping what it keeps. Chance sits with her — grown now, a teacher herself, the season's best student in its only subject, unlearning it in public annually on purpose. They are still an arm's length apart. They have never once discussed the distance. And when the sitting is done and the children are released shrieking up the road into their ordinary priceless boring afternoon, the two of them stay a minute longer at the waterline, the aunt and the girl, the clerk and the count, and one of them — they trade the office year by year — gives the marsh the last word of the visit, two soft clicks of the tongue, quietly, in no one's direction and everyone's:

still here.

GLOSSARY

CABARET [ka-ba-RAY] — French, as the hills use it, *the drinking house*. A mud room with benches and a shelf of banana beer, where the greeting was called over the low wall and, that season, where the day shift drank its wages.

COMMUNE [ko-MYOON] — French, as the hills use it, *the district*. The tier of local government with its office at the crossroads; “there is milk at the commune” was the day shift’s bait.

GACACA [ga-CHA-cha] — Kinyarwanda, *justice on the grass*. The courts the state sent home to the hills a decade after: the neighbors assembled in the open, the accused standing among the people of his own paths, the survivors as the evidence.

GUKORA [goo-KO-ra] — Kinyarwanda, *to work, to do*. The most ordinary word a farming country owns, and within a week the only word anyone used for the killing.

ICYI [EE-chee] — Kinyarwanda, *the long dry season*. June to August, when the marsh falls a hand’s width a week; “nobody has ever had to fetch the dry season.”

INYENZI [ee-NYEN-zee] — Kinyarwanda, *cockroaches*. The radio’s name for the rebel army over the border, let slide until it meant the neighbors too — a creature you find where it hides.

ITUMBA [ee-TOOM-ba] — Kinyarwanda, *the long rains*. March to the middle of May; the rain that raised the water over the lying-places and drummed on the papyrus so hard that whole shifts of probing were called off.

KINYARWANDA [kee-nya-RWAN-da] — Kinyarwanda, *the language of Rwanda*. Spoken by Hutu, Tutsi and Twa alike; the front’s northern accent in it was the first sound the marsh had no kind for.

KWIBUKA [kwee-BOO-ka] — Kinyarwanda, *remember*. The name of the remembering season, when the survivors recite the count at the crossroads; not a suggestion but the name of an office.

KWIYUMVIRA MU MAZI [kwee-yoom-VEE-ra moo MA-zee] — Kinyarwanda, *hearing oneself in the water*. Théoneste's grandmother's name for the wide listening the trap-setter and the reed-cutter know — the room older than the hunt.

MURAHU [moo-RA-ho] — Kinyarwanda, *you are still there*. The greeting of the hill — an observation confirmed daily, neighbor to neighbor, until the season turned it into bait.

UBWOKO [oo-BWO-ko] — Kinyarwanda, *the kind*. The line on the first page of the identity card — Hutu, Tutsi, Twa — that the Belgians put there sixty years before and the barriers read.

UMURYANGO [oo-moo-RYAN-go] — Kinyarwanda, *the family, the household*. The people of one enclosure; Radio Umuryango, the Family Radio, called every listener its cousin.

Rwanda, April 1994. On a hill above the papyrus marshes the greeting is muraho — you are still there — and Vestine has exchanged it with her neighbor Évariste every market morning for ten years. Then a plane falls out of the sky over the capital, the Family Radio's warm-voiced Cousin announces that the household has work to do, and within a week the hill is killing itself by list and by schedule: barriers made of benches, machetes checked out like farm tools, her own house courteously informed that it is not until Thursday.

When the church becomes the trap it was always going to be, Vestine goes down into the marsh with a six-year-old on her back and an old cutter of papyrus for a teacher, and learns the one discipline the killers have not read: lie under the water, give the day nothing, and be called back at dusk.

As the long rains end and the water begins handing its people over, the stillness deepens into something stranger than hiding — the only refuge the genocide cannot enter, and perhaps the genocide finishing its work by other means.

A hundred days, one season. Somewhere else on earth it was simply spring.

Be more patient than the water, and louder than the radio, and still there at the end.

FROM THE UNWITNESSED WARS

ROYA PUBLICATIONS

