

JAMES ROY + NOËL ZIHABAMWE

one
thousand
hills



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This town.

Small, clinging to the bottom of the crooked valley like grime in a fingerprint. The slopes in this part of the country were steep, and the mountains were always in the edge of your view. The gorillas lived in those mountains, and the tourists came to see the gorillas. They stayed in the lodge with the tall white fence and the metal gates, and took photos of the town as they were driven through in their minibus. But they never stopped in town. They just took photos through the dusty windows of their minivans and safari trucks.

Pascal had never been to see the gorillas. He didn't know anyone who had. One of his brother's friends, Kami, said that his father was a guide, and that may or may not have been true. Pascal didn't trust anything Kami said anyway. He'd been known to lie in the past. He was a snake. Unable to be trusted. Just like his younger brother, Paul.

This town, with its handful of shops. The main street, its short section of tar the only sealed road for kilometres in any direction, the only relief from the bone-jarring ruts and potholes, a thin, ragged strip of asphalt along the middle of a much wider strip of dirt, dusty in the dry and muddy in the wet, padded free of grass and weeds by thousands of feet.

What else in the town? A bar for the grown-ups. A small grocery store opposite the school and the giant strangler fig tree on the corner of the road that led up to the seminary and its church. The medical clinic beside Mr. Ingabire's store, run by Dr. Singh and his wife, who worked as the clinic nurse. The mechanic's garage with the stacks of broken

motorcycles and worn tires at the side. And behind the main row of shops was the market, a narrow, sloping lane lined with stalls and faded umbrellas, all faintly tinted with red dust and peppered with stray dogs.

Pascal's family lived high on the eastern side of the valley. From the front of their house they looked down on the roofs of the town and over the stripes of green terraces. Directly across the valley was the seminary. The church had once been white. Now, when viewed from up close, it was streaked by years of rain and red dust. But from Pascal's house it still appeared white, especially in the early morning. It stood out starkly against the bright green of the grass and trees and bushes, and when the morning mist came through the valley and settled over the town like a steaming lake, the church floated above it like a ship.

Tucked in behind the church was the seminary itself. Two classrooms, a kitchen and small dining room, the dormitory where the young trainee priests lived, Father Michel's house with his office next door. And through a steel gate in a tall red brick fence was the compound where the nuns lived and worked.

The nuns kept vegetable gardens and chickens.

The priests kept goats and some cows.

Everything was shared. But they never drank the milk they collected.

They gave it all away to the poor.

All of it.

They were servants of God, walking in Jesus' footsteps. Following his example.

Caring for the people.

All of the people.

All of the people. Men, women, children, Hutu, Tutsi,
Twa.

All of them.