

Trunk of an Elephant
by
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SUPER:

For more than two decades, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been embroiled in conflict, resulting in the deaths and forced displacement of millions. The people live in constant fear of the unspeakable atrocities inflicted by marauding rebel groups and the Congolese Army.

OVER BLACK:

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF AFRICAN VILLAGE - DAY

A dirt road unfurls like a red clay ribbon along the edge of dense primeval forest. Waves of heat ripple from the surface.

A TINY FIGURE, dwarfed by the blue expanse of sky, balances an impossibly large bundle of firewood on her head.

SUPER: THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

SOLANGE, 10, dressed in bright clothing, sweats under the heavy load. As she makes the long trek back to her village, she sings sweetly in Swahili, SUBTITLED:

SOLANGE
*Oh boat, come back to me.
Since you carried my child away,
I have not seen that child.
Oh boat, come back to me.*

Solange freezes. The SHADOW of an ARMED REBEL in the road ahead. Her eyes grow wide. Her hands go slack. Firewood spills from her grip in SLO-MO as she SCREAMS.

Her SCREAM is swallowed by high-pitched ULULATIONS as --

-- BLACK HANDS beat wildly on drums and BARE FEET stomp the dusty earth. Colorful garments swirl and black skin glistens under the scorching summer sun. WOMEN dance, clap, and shake their hips to the infectious tribal rhythms. Drums BUILD TO A CRESCENDO as the women are swept into trancelike ecstasy.

TITLE: TRUNK OF AN ELEPHANT

SUPER: LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - ER TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

A BABY-FACED TEEN with gang tats winces as MIA, 36, blond, cleans and bandages a gunshot wound to his arm. She moves with quick efficiency, regards him with genuine concern.

MIA
You're lucky it was just your arm.
Next time could be a lot worse. I
don't want to see you back in this
ER, understood?

The sullen teen nods.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

REGINA, 42, an African American nurse, sits on a bench, scrolling through texts. She glances up as Mia enters.

MIA
Two ODs, one GSW.

Mia heads towards her locker.

REGINA
I'll see your gunshot and raise
you a stabbing.

MIA
Stabbing?

REGINA
Barbecue skewer.

MIA
Eww... Fold.

Regina grins, triumphant. Mia changes out of dirty scrubs.

REGINA
Off early?

MIA
I promised I'd pick up Thai food
and be home in time to tuck Cole
in. Want to join us?

REGINA
Wish I could. I'm on a double.

MIA
Another one?

REGINA

Need to clock as many hours as I
can before I leave for Africa.

MIA

But that's still months away.

REGINA

Yeah, but I'm taking a pay cut so
I need to start saving now.

MIA

Next time, then.

She heads to the door. Regina resumes scrolling.

REGINA

Enjoy the curry.

MIA

Thanks, you have a good night.

INT. MIA'S HOUSE - ENTRY / LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mia enters, carrying two takeout bags. COLE, 6, giggles
hysterically as he and NOAH, 38, wrestle in the living room.

MIA

Hey, you two.

They both poke their heads up.

NOAH

Hi, hon.

COLE

Hi, Mom!

They resume wrestling. Mia laughs and heads to the kitchen.

INT. MIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mia flips on the light, startled by an IGUANA in the sink,
its beady eyes fixed on her.

MIA

Hey, why's the lizard in the sink?

Noah enters as she sets the takeout on the counter.

NOAH

Cole thinks Stanley's sick.

MIA

Why? What's wrong with him?

NOAH
He says he's got... reptile
dysfunction.

They both burst out laughing.

NOAH (CONT'D)
He heard something on the radio. I
figured I'd let the medical
professional explain it to him.

MIA
Did you now?

Noah draws Mia close, moves a wisp of hair from her cheek,
kisses her. She leans into him, sighs heavily.

MIA (CONT'D)
I had a gunshot today. Kid
couldn't have been more than
thirteen. He's okay, but sometimes
I wish Cole would never grow up. I
just want him to stay sweet and
innocent and worry about stupid
lizards that can't get erections.

NOAH
Yeah, poor lizards.

INT. MIA'S HOUSE - COLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CONSTELLATIONS projected onto the ceiling illuminate the dark
room. On the dresser, a small cage houses Stanley.

COLE
I see it! The big dipper!

Cole lies in bed clutching a small stuffed iguana. He stares
up at the ceiling with enthusiasm reserved for little boys
and space. Mia sits beside him. She points overhead.

MIA
And see that bright one just
below? That's the North Star. If
you're ever lost, all you have to
do is look up at the sky and the
North Star will guide you home.

COLE
Are these the same stars from when
you were little?

MIA
Each one of these stars is
billions and billions of years
old. And, in a way, so are we.

COLE

But I'm six.

MIA

Yes, I know you're six, but everything you see -- the trees, the flowers, the animals, you, me, dad -- we're all made of stardust, making us as old as time itself.

COLE

Even Stanley?

MIA

Yes, even Stanley.

INT. MIA'S CAR - DRIVING - DAY

Mia drives, checks the rearview mirror, smiles at Cole. He's in his soccer uniform, happily singing along to the radio.

MIA

You excited, bud? First big game.

COLE

I hope I get to be goalie. Hey, why didn't Dad come with us?

MIA

He had to stop by the office, but he'll meet us over at the park.

Mia turns into a gas station.

COLE

But, Mom, we'll be late!

MIA

We won't get there at all if we run out of gas.

She pulls up to a pump. Shuts the engine. Removes the key.

COLE

No, Mom, wait! I love that song!

Mia laughs, REINSERTS KEY, turns it to accessory, gets out.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Mia stands at the pump, listening to Cole singing inside the car. She selects the fuel grade, lifts the nozzle.

There's a FLASH OF A MAN behind her. A door SLAMS. Cole SCREAMS. Mia turns. The nozzle CRASHES to the ground.

MIA

COLE!!!

Mia lunges at Cole's door. She grabs his arm. As she pulls him out, his FOOT GETS TANGLED in the seat belt. The engine STARTS. Cole's TERRIFIED EYES lock onto Mia's as she tries desperately to free him. The carjacker drives off.

MIA (CONT'D)

No! No! Wait!!!

Mia holds onto Cole with all her strength, but he slips from her grasp. He reaches his arms out towards her.

COLE

MOM!!!

Mia chases after the car, running as hard as she can, screaming Cole's name as he's dragged through the lot.

SUPER: SIX MONTHS LATER

INT. MIA'S HOUSE - COLE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mia sleeps fitfully. Sunlight strikes her face and her eyelids twitch. She jolts awake, sits up, drenched in sweat.

Her hair is longer. Her skin sallow. Dark circles rim her eyes. She's alone in Cole's bed. The room is stripped bare, packed up in boxes, except for Stanley's cage.

A moment of confusion as she untangles the threads of reality from sleep -- a horror she faces anew each morning.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Mia and Regina sip coffee on a park bench as children laugh and play on a nearby jungle gym.

MIA

It sounds so stupid, but I really used to think that if you did everything right -- worked hard, treated people well, paid your taxes, you were somehow insulated from tragedy.

REGINA

Well, I don't claim to know much, but I do know life ain't fair.

MIA

I was thinking back to the very first time I held Cole. It wasn't

(MORE)

MIA (CONT'D)

love I felt, it was more this
overwhelming sense of... my God, I
have to keep him alive. How do I
even do that?

REGINA

Lots of women feel that way, at
least the ones not lying about it.

MIA

I was supposed to protect him.
That was my job and I failed him.

REGINA

No one thinks this was your fault.

MIA

Noah does. He doesn't say it, but
I see it in his eyes.

REGINA

He's grieving. He'll come around.

Mia shakes her head.

MIA

Some things are too awful for even
the best marriages to survive.

REGINA

Have you thought about coming back
to work? It might be good for you.

MIA

I can't go back. Nothing fits
anymore. It's like I'm an alien in
my own life. I can't bear the way
people look at me, either with
pity, or they act like nothing
happened, like Cole never existed.
They don't even say his name.
Grief is the loneliest fucking
feeling in the world.

Regina is quiet as a thought brews.

REGINA

This is gonna sound crazy, but why
don't you come with me?

MIA

To the DRC? Trade one war zone for
another? No thanks.

REGINA

We'd be far from the conflict
zones and we'd have security. You
(MORE)

REGINA (CONT'D)
could help run the clinic. We
always need nurses, especially
someone with your training. I
mean, it's really not that crazy.

MIA
It's completely crazy.

REGINA
There's so much need there, Mia.
You have no idea. You'd feel
useful and it would give you time
to figure things out.

MIA
I don't know.

REGINA
You don't have to decide anything
right now. Just think about it.

INT. MIA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mia researches the DRC on her laptop, scrolling through
haunting images of death and destruction. She closes the lid,
moved by what she's seen.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Mia's car pulls up in front of an apartment complex. She gets
out, opens the trunk, carries Stanley's cage up the walkway.

INT. NOAH'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Mia and Noah stand at the kitchen counter with Stanley's cage
between them. Emotionally, they're miles apart.

MIA
You think it's crazy.

NOAH
It's crazy and dangerous. DRC's a
war zone. You get that, don't you?

MIA
(shrugs)
I work in South Central. Cole was
killed three miles from our house.

Noah's face darkens.

NOAH
Your point?

MIA

My point is life's a fucking
crapshoot. Anything can happen
anywhere at anytime to anyone.

NOAH

When you're not paying attention.

Noah pulled the pin. Mia lobbs the grenade.

MIA

Why don't you just say it? You've
been wanting to say it for months.

NOAH

You know, you're not the only one
grieving here! He was my son, too!

MIA

But you weren't there! You didn't
hold his broken body. You didn't
watch the life drain from his
beautiful face.

NOAH

No, and I wasn't the one who left
the key in the fucking ignition!

His words hit Mia like a punch.

INT. MIA'S CAR - DRIVING - DAY

Mia races down a suburban street, distracted, still reeling
from the fight. She runs a red light.

COLE (V.O.)

Mom!!!

A BLARING HORN jolts her attention. She slams the brakes,
narrowly avoiding a collision. Heart pounding, she pulls over
to the curb. It feels like her entire world is crashing down.
She grips the steering wheel, wrestling with a decision.

EXT. SKY - DAY

The SPUTTERING HUM of a PROP PLANE. From a sea of clouds
appears a Russian taxi with wings, wobbling thousands of feet
above a vast emerald rainforest.

INT. PROP PLANE - DAY

The ten seater shuttles Mia, TRUDI, 62, an Australian aid
worker with cropped hair and a no-nonsense demeanor, an old

MISSIONARY COUPLE, and SIX CONGOLESE MERCHANTS, swilling hootch and singing loudly in French, SUBTITLED:

DRUNK MERCHANTS
*From the forest to the bush,
 From the bush to the ocean,
 One people, one soul,
 One heart, ardent and proud.
 Let us all fight, every one of us,
 For our old black country.*

The plane hits heavy turbulence. The missionary woman crosses herself, prays. Mia doesn't react. She stares out the tiny, dirt-streaked window into blue oblivion, lost in a memory. Trudi notices her pallor and assumes it's the flight. She reaches across the aisle, offers her pills.

TRUDI
 Dramamine?

MIA
 Oh, no thank you. I'm fine.

Mia turns back to the window. Far below, thatched-roof huts dot green rolling hillsides.

EXT. SKY - DAY

The engine stalls. The plane lurches, then drops sharply.

INT. PROP PLANE - DAY

BLACK HANDS white-knuckle seat backs as the plane makes a harrowing dive before righting itself. The merchants laugh, resume singing with increased fervor in French, SUBTITLED:

DRUNK MERCHANTS
*And if we have to die,
 what does it really matter?
 Our children everywhere will
 be able to say how triumph comes
 through battle,
 And in the smallest village
 Sing beneath our three colors.*

Trudi shouts to Mia over the racket.

TRUDI
 Be a shame to get killed before
 the rebels get a shot at us.
 Speakin' of which, ya might want
 to lean away from the window 'til
 we land. They're known to shoot
 these birds outta the sky.

Mia draws back as the plane begins a quick descent.

MIA
I take it you've done this before.

TRUDI
My eighth mission. Third to the
DRC. I go where there's sufferin',
and these days you can't beat the
DRC for sufferin'.

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

A group of people crowd the dirt landing strip. GOATS graze along the edge. An aircraft's cannibalized carcass sits abandoned in the grass.

The plane swoops low, skimming over treetops. The people and goats scatter into the bush.

INT. PROP PLANE - DAY

As the plane taxis in, children emerge from the trees. Mia watches them running alongside the plane, laughing and waving. She smiles and waves back at them.

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

Mia and Trudi disembark into suffocating heat and chaos. Desperate people rush past them, carrying oversized bundles, jostling for space on the tiny aircraft.

A CONGOLESE WOMAN accidentally bumps into Mia. Their haunted eyes meet in a brief moment of connection, before Trudi grabs Mia's arm and pulls her through the bustling crowd.

TRUDI
C'mon, this way.

EXT. AREA NEAR RUNWAY - DAY

Mia is on her cell phone, straining to hear over the static.

MIA
I can't... No, we just landed.
We're still waiting for the truck.

INT. IDP CAMP - OFFICE - INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

Regina feels a surge of alarm as she skims a report.

REGINA

Mia, listen, you need to be very careful, fighting's broken out in the region to the north of you.

MIA

Sorry, what was that?

REGINA

I said you need to...

MIA

I couldn't hear you. Say again?

REGINA

Mia, are you there?

MIA

Regina? Can you hear me?

The line goes dead.

REGINA

Shit!

EXT. AREA NEAR RUNWAY - DAY

A sun-bleached PICKUP crammed with cargo, goats, chickens, and the six Congolese merchants from the plane.

The old missionary couple is helped onto the truck bed. They wave to Mia and Trudi as the truck drives off, swallowed like a hungry lion by towering vegetation.

MIA

Maybe we should've gone with them.

Trudi squints against the sun's harsh glare.

TRUDI

Three days in the sun with the chickens and the stench, they'll wish to God they'd stayed with us.

Trudi checks her cell phone for a signal.

TRUDI (CONT'D)

Damn thing's useless as tits on a bull. What about yours?

MIA

Battery's dead.

TRUDI

C'mon, let's get out of this furnace and find some shade, eh?

They head towards a small clutch of trees.

MIA

What if the truck doesn't come?

TRUDI

Ah, no worries, mate, she'll be right. We can always hitch a ride.

EXT. AREA NEAR RUNWAY - DAY

THREE CONGOLESE MEN argue in Swahili beside a beat-up Land Rover. Mia and Trudi sit in the shade of a msasa tree.

TRUDI

He waltzed into the kitchen one mornin' and said he was buggerin' off. Just like that. No excuse. No explanation. No sorry.

MIA

Wow, what did you do?

TRUDI

I was having a cuppa', so naturally, I threw it at him. But, really, it was a gift he gave me. If he hadn't buggered off, I'd still be in Perth tendin' my roses. A mate dragged me to Africa to drown my sorrows. Set my life on a whole new course. I fell in love with the people, the land, the culture. He was a bit of a wanker anyway.

Trudi laughs, digs in her rucksack, hands Mia a cookie.

TRUDI (CONT'D)

Here, have a bikkie. This heat'll make ya woozy.

MIA

Thanks.

TRUDI

And what's your story, mate?

MIA

I don't have a story.

TRUDI

Everyone has a story. Ya married?

MIA
I was. It was good, really good,
until it wasn't.

TRUDI
That's usually the way, eh? Any
ankle-biters runnin' around?

MIA
Um...

TRUDI
Ya got kids?

Mia hesitates.

MIA
No, no kids.

MUSA, 19, breaks away from the men and approaches the women.

MUSA
They say it will cost two hundred.

TRUDI
Tell 'em that's bloody extortion.

MUSA
This is Africa. What you expect?

TRUDI
I expect our truck to be right
where it's meant to be.

MUSA
Maybe broke. Maybe stuck. Maybe
not come. Could be many days wait.

MIA
What about another truck?

MUSA
The transport is very irregular.
Every few weeks a truck may come.

MIA
Every few weeks?
(to Trudi)
So, what do we do?

Trudi assesses the men. SYLVESTRE, 40s, seems brusque, giving her pause, but PASCAL, 34, grins, waves, and seals the deal.

TRUDI
Unless we fancy spendin' the night
in the bush, I reckon we pay.

MUSA

Very good. Very good.

He waves them over. Sylvestre avoids eye contact. Pascal effusively shakes their hands. Trudi finds him amusing.

PASCAL

Jambo! Jambo!

TRUDI

G'Day to ya, too!

Pascal carries their rucksacks to the Land Rover. Mia follows and notices a deep scar on the back of his head.

Trudi counts the cash and hands it to Sylvestre. He smiles, opening his arms in a grand gesture.

SYLVESTRE

Welcome to the DRC!

Trudi raises a dubious eyebrow.

TRUDI

Hmph, alright then. So, how long
ya reckon it'll take to get there?

SYLVESTRE

There is no such way to tell these
things. Maybe two day. Maybe four.
Depend on road. Depend on rebel.
Depend on bandit. Depend on...

TRUDI

Yeah, I reckon I've got it.

SYLVESTRE

Do not worry. Truck very good. I
am very good driver. Very familiar
with the driving.

He kicks the door until it opens. Trudi climbs in, muttering.

TRUDI

That gives me no comfort at all.

EXT. / INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Black smoke belches from the Land Rover, cutting a path through elephant grass until they reach the road.

Pascal rides shotgun, with Mia, Trudi and Musa in the back. Behind them, an exodus of villagers bleed onto the road like a ruptured artery. Mia watches through the back window.

MIA
Where are they all going?

MUSA
To the bush to hide. Some will try
to reach the camp in Minova.

MIA
But that could take weeks.

MUSA
Yes. Many will die along the way.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Mia gazes out the window as the Land Rover winds past burned
out villages, dying rice and bean fields.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - DAY

A remote village bordered by forest. Dogs laze under sun-
dappled mango trees. WOMEN wash clothing in a small stream.

A group of YOUNG CHILDREN attend class in the open air. Their
teacher, TRESOR, 27, speaks French and points to body parts.

TRESOR
La main.

CHILDREN
Hand.

TRESOR
Oui. Les doigts.

CHILDREN
Fingers.

TRESOR
Bon. Le pied.

CHILDREN
Foot.

TRESOR
Tres bon. Les doigts de pieds.

Blank stares. Emmanuel, 7, raises his hand.

TRESOR (CONT'D)
Oui, Emmanuel.

EMMANUEL
Foot fingers?

Tresor and the children burst out laughing.

EXT. LAND ROVER - AERIAL VIEW - DAY

A slow moving dot in the immense green landscape.

MUSA (PRE-LAP)

I come from a village in Kananga.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

MUSA

My father was schoolteacher. My mother sell clothing in the market. It was a good life. Very happy life for me and my family.

MIA

Where is your family now?

MUSA

Both my parents are dead. The war take everything. I was studying to be engineer, but there is no more the school, no more the job. The life now is very bitter.

Musa's eyes grow distant. He turns his face to the window where vines twist like angry pythons around massive tree trunks, and giant palms crane towards the sun. Everything in the jungle must fight for survival.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - DAY

Toddlers chase a flock of hens under the watchful eyes of THREE WOMEN, who pound manioc with giant wooden pestles. NYASSA and NEEMA, mid-20s, carry infants in slings on their backs. ALLEGRA, 34, pregnant, pauses to stretch.

NYASSA

How are you feeling?

ALLEGRA

Very tired. I am hoping this baby will come soon.

NEEMA

Have you decided on a name?

ALLEGRA

Solomon and I have not, but Emmanuel is very decided. He wants to call it Beckham if it is a boy.

NYASSA
And if it is a girl?

ALLEGRA
Beckham.

They all laugh.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - DIRT FIELD - DAY

A GROUP OF BOYS chase a soccer ball made of rolled banana leaves bound with twine. Emmanuel corners the ball.

BOY (O.S.)
Get it, Emmanuel! Run! Run!

Emmanuel runs, zigzags, evades the other players.

EMMANUEL
Bienvenu! Bienvenu! Over here!

He kicks the ball to BIENVENU, the oldest at 13, who deftly juggles it between feet and knees, flicks it front to back, then spins around as the younger boys try to intercept. They leap on top of him, laughing, and tumble to the ground.

The game ends and the players scatter. Bienvenu walks over to Omela, 7, who waits for him under a tree, giggling.

BIENVENU
What is so funny?

OMELA
They got you good this time!

BIENVENU
They may have got me, but they did not get the ball, and that is the point. Are you ready?

OMELA
Yes.

He turns and crouches. Omela wraps her arms around his neck. Her withered legs hang limply. He grasps them about his waist and heads to their hut.

OMELA (CONT'D)
Will you remember me when you are a famous soccer star in America?

BIENVENU
I thought you were coming with me?

OMELA
You will take me?

BIENVENU

You are my number one fan. Of course, I will take you.

OMELA

Can we leave tomorrow?

BIENVENU

It is very far away. It is much too far to walk.

OMELA

Then how will we get there?

BIENVENU

When the Jesus people return, we will ask to go with them.

INT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - ZAWADI AND MUFUTA'S HUT - DAY

ZAWADI, 34, stirs a pot over a cookstove. She breaks pieces of wood and adds them to the flames. MUFUTA, 38, sits on the floor, his expression troubled.

MUFUTA

The attacks were less than a hundred kilometres from here. It is only a matter of time before the rebels reach our village.

Zawadi sets a bowl of cassava and mwamba on the floor.

ZAWADI

I will not leave our home.

MUFUTA

Then we must send the children away to where it is safe.

ZAWADI

How will Omela travel such a great distance? Who will look after her?

MUFUTA

Bienvenu will keep her safe.

ZAWADI

And who will keep Bienvenu safe?

Bienvenu enters with Omela.

BIENVENU

Keep me safe from what?

He looks from his mother to his father.

ZAWADI
From nothing. Come eat your
supper.

Bienvenu seats Omela in Mufuta's lap. Mufuta pulls her close.

MUFUTA
How is my precious one?

Omela giggles. Bienvenu senses something is wrong. He looks again at his mother, at the worry etched on her face.

INT. / EXT. LAND ROVER - DAY

The Land Rover rounds a bend. CHICKENS flap in the road. Up ahead is a truck. A sheared off wheel on the ground. Something dark beside it. Sylvestre tenses, slows down.

MIA
What is it?

They inch closer.

TRUDI
Good God...

It's the white pickup from the airstrip. Windows smashed. Truck riddled with bullet holes. A body on the ground.

MUSA
Go, go, go!

Sylvestre quickly shifts into reverse.

TRUDI
Hang on! What if they're alive?

SYLVESTRE
We cannot stop. It is not safe.

Trudi jumps out of the moving truck. Musa chases after her.

MUSA
Come back! It is too dangerous!

Mia jumps out too, but she blanches at the gruesome sight.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - GAS STATION - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Mia is covered in Cole's blood, cradling his lifeless body.

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY (PRESENT)

Trudi climbs onto the truck bed. The merchants and the old missionary man are dead, but the woman clings to life.

MISSIONARY WOMAN

Jesus... save me.

TRUDI

(takes her hand)

I've got ya. No worries, I've got ya now. Look here, look at me.

Musa's eyes nervously dart about the trees.

MUSA

Please, we must go.

TRUDI

(to woman)

Don't be scared, mate. It's all good. I'm right here with ya.

She waits for the woman's eyes to cloud. Musa helps her down. They run to the Land Rover, where Mia stands, pale as a carp.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Spooked, Sylvestre veers off the road onto a narrow track, leading them deeper into the bush. The jungle walls close around them like a vice. Trudi shakes her head.

TRUDI

She just wanted to help.

They drive in silence, staring out at twisted limbs and gnarled trunks of a dark forest that cloaks much evil.

EXT. / INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

The Land Rover moves at a glacial pace under a canopy of flora so thick, you can't tell day from night.

MIA

Do we have any idea where we are?

SYLVESTRE

We must stay hidden. Rebels control the roads. If we are seen, we will be robbed or worse.

Mia and Trudi share a look. Branches scratch at the windows like angry claws. Pascal speaks in Swahili. Musa translates.

MUSA (PRE-LAP)
She was ten year-old. She
disappear collecting firewood.

EXT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Vines encase the SUV. Pascal hacks at them with a machete.

MUSA (O.S.)
He search the forest. Hear scream
and gunshots. Mai-Mai set fire to
his village. He smell the burning
flesh of friends and neighbors.
They kill the men. Rape the women
and girls, then kill them too.

Pascal rips a thick vine out of the earth with his hands.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

As they drive, Pascal continues the story in Swahili, his
eyes black pools of pain.

MUSA
(translating)
He run back to find his family,
but get hit in the head. They say
his family perish in the fire, but
he know his daughter is alive. He
still feel her pulse in his vein.

This pierces Mia's heart.

MIA
His little girl, what's her name?

Musa asks Pascal. Pascal turns to Mia.

PASCAL
Solange.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Wipers sweep away red dust. The Land Rover creeps down a
narrow trail between steep dirt banks. It hits something hard
and they all JOLT FORWARD.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Musa and Pascal size up a tree stump blocking the path. They
argue in Swahili, SUBTITLED:

MUSA
It will not fit.

PASCAL
I am certain it will fit.

MUSA
It is not possible.

PASCAL
All things are possible.
(yells to Sylvestre)
Turn to the left... yes, good... a
little more... a little more...

MUSA
Careful! It is too close.

The truck scrapes the bank, the right wheel wedges against the stump. The gears make an awful grinding noise.

PASCAL
It will not fit. We must dig.

Musa rolls his eyes. Sylvestre shuts the engine, gets out, grabs shovels from the back. They begin to chip at the bank.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Mia is lost in thought. Trudi bangs on her cell phone.

TRUDI
C'mon!... Bugger! Phone carked it.

MIA
What do you think happened to her?

TRUDI
To who?

MIA
Pascal's daughter.

TRUDI
The DRC's the most dangerous place on earth for women and girls. She could've been killed, snatched up by rebels, who bloody knows?

MIA
I don't know what's worse, knowing your child's dead or not knowing what happened to them.

TRUDI
They're both worse.

Mia watches Pascal dig.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - DAY

A SHOVEL lifts a mound of dirt. Mufuta, SOLOMON and CHRISTIAN, early 30s, dig a sewage trench behind a row of thatched-roofed huts.

SOLOMON

It is madness. The rebels have taken over their homes and they are being charged to work their own fields.

CHRISTIAN

What happens if they don't work or refuse to pay?

SOLOMON

They are beaten, sometimes killed. Many have let the fields perish and have fled to the bush or to the camps because they are afraid.

CHRISTIAN

Is it FDLR? Who is to blame?

Mufuta stabs hard at the earth, sweat pours down his face.

MUFUTA

It is FDLR, Mai-Mai, LRA, the Congolese Army. There are now hundreds of factions. Who can even know who is responsible?

(stops digging)

They are moving deeper into the forest. I fear they will soon make their way here.

CHRISTIAN

What does the Chief say?

MUFUTA

He says he can no longer ensure our safety. He says we should prepare to leave.

CHRISTIAN

And go where? Our fields are here. How are we to feed our families?

Mufuta leans on the shovel, wipes his brow.

MUFUTA

That I do not know.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The men have carved a wider passage. Pascal stops digging.

PASCAL
(in Swahili, subtitled)
I think it will now fit.

As Sylvestre and Musa lay down their shovels, TWO REBELS appear from the trees, shouting and waving M16s. One wears a BERET, the other fake RAY-BANS.

INT. LAND ROVER - CONTINUOUS

Mia and Trudi watch in horror.

TRUDI
Bloody hell!

MIA
What do they want?

TRUDI
Dunno. Hope just cash.

Beret shoves Musa to his knees, presses the gun to his head.

MIA
Oh my God...

Mia rifles through her rucksack.

TRUDI
What are ya doin'?

EXT. JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

RAY-BANS
No one is permitted to stop here.
You must pay the fine or we shoot.

SYLVESTRE
We have no money. We are drivers.
Our truck is stuck on that tree.

Beret cocks the M16. Musa squeezes his eyes shut. Sylvestre spreads his arms as if to block the bullets.

SYLVESTRE (CONT'D)
No, wait! Wait!

Mia bursts from the Land Rover, shouting.

MIA
Don't shoot! Don't shoot!

TRUDI
Mia!!

She runs straight at the rebels, holding up cash.

MIA
I have money! See? Here, take it!
They turn their guns on Mia. Sylvestre steps between them.

SYLVESTRE
No, it is okay! She is nurse!
Beret shoves Sylvestre aside, grabs Mia roughly by the arm.

BERET
Five hundred or she comes with us.
Mia's blood goes cold. Pascal grips his shovel, catches Musa's eye. In a flash, Musa grabs the shovel at his feet, levels Ray-Bans. Pascal hits Beret. They race to the SUV.

MUSA
Run! Run! Hurry!
Ray-Bans fires. Mia drops to the ground. Musa pulls her to her feet. They jump in the Land Rover.

MUSA (CONT'D)
Go! Go! Go!
Sylvestre guns the engine, maneuvers around the tree stump, runs over Beret's legs. His SCREAMS fill the forest.

INT. LAND ROVER - CONTINUOUS

BULLETS SHATTER the back window. The SUV crashes through bushes, scuds over rough terrain. Sylvestre stops at a safe distance, glares back at Mia.

SYLVESTRE
What you do is very stupid! Life cheap in Congo. They kill you quick as they crush a bug.
Musa turns to Mia.

MUSA
Very stupid, yes, but thank you.

EXT. MUD HOLE - DAY

BROWN LIQUID is funneled into a plastic jerrycan. Trudi drops in a purification tablet, caps it, and hands it to Pascal.

TRUDI
Ya gotta give it a shake.
(motions shaking)
To mix. Then ya drink. Tu bois.
(motions drinking)

Pascal shakes the jerrycan, shrugs, sets it by the Land Rover where Sylvestre patches an already over-patched tire.

Trudi watches Mia skeptically as she fill two canteens.

TRUDI (CONT'D)
That was bloody heroic, what ya
did back there.

MIA
I wasn't being heroic.

She hands Trudi the canteens.

TRUDI
Reckless, then?

Mia seems just as baffled by her actions.

MIA
I guess I just reacted.

TRUDI
Ya know, I've been doin' this a
long time and I've seen all kinds.
Some come to places like this,
thinkin' they're on a mission from
God and they're gonna save the
world. Some folks are just tryin'
to save themselves from whatever
demons are chasin' them. And some
put themselves in danger, secretly
hopin' they won't make it home.
So, mate, which one are ya?

Mia isn't sure, answers honestly.

MIA
Maybe a little of each.

TRUDI
Lemme save ya some trouble, eh? Ya
can't save everyone. Ya can't
outrun your demons. And if ya do
have a death wish, we're gonna
(MORE)

TRUDI (CONT'D)
have a problem. Ya see, I've got
no interest in bein' a martyr. I'm
here to do a job and get out in
one piece. So, give that a good
think next time ya ready to react.

Trudi splits a tablet, drops half into each bottle. The
tension lingers. Mia gamely tries to break through.

MIA
So, was he really a wanker?

Trudi can't help but laugh. Mia laughs with her.

TRUDI
I was married to that bloody
wanker for a solid twenty years. I
didn't even know how miserable and
angry I was 'til he buggered off.

MIA
And now?

TRUDI
Now? Well, I guess I'm not
miserable, but I'm still bloody
angry, just now it's over more
important things like evil,
corruption, injustice. But, I
don't know, bein' here and seein'
all I've seen, I reckon it's
softened me a bit. Made me a
little more compassionate.

MIA
How can you have compassion for
rapists and murderers?

TRUDI
That's the challenge, eh? We feel
for the victims, but there's
suffering all around. Anger's
bloody easy. Trust me, I'm an
expert. But compassion, now that's
a tough nut to crack.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - DAY

The coral sun stretches toward the horizon. Men drink palm
wine. Children play. Women chat in small groups.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

The Land Rover travels past banana groves and tilled manioc fields, pitching over ruts like a raft in a hurricane. Mia, Trudi and Musa bounce around in the back.

MIA
It's getting dark. Think we're
maybe close to a village?

MUSA
We will need a place to sleep.

SYLVESTRE
These are not our people. It is
better to keep driving.

The Land Rover hits something and veers to the left. The front wheel SINKS INTO A CRATER. The SUV FLIPS ONTO ITS SIDE. Pascal slides into Sylvestre, triggering the HORN.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - DAY

Villagers HEAR the HORN. Emmanuel, hanging upside down, jumps from a tree limb. The children run excitedly down the path, followed nearly as excitedly by the adults.

EXT. UPTURNED LAND ROVER - DAY

The children swarm the Land Rover, pointing and shouting "muzungo" (white person) as Mia and Trudi climb out.

Sylvestre warily eyes the crowd. CHIEF LUCIEN, 45, steps forward and warmly extends his hand.

CHIEF LUCIEN
Mbote! I am Chief Lucien. It seems
you have run into trouble.

Trudi adjusts her disheveled clothing, shakes his hand.

TRUDI
Seems we're a bit bogged. Ya
wouldn't have a winch, would ya?

CHIEF LUCIEN
No, but I have strong men to help.

EXT. LAND ROVER - DAY

The villagers rally together to lift the SUV. Chief Lucien's brow furrows as he and Trudi speak away from the crowd.

CHIEF LUCIEN
How many did you encounter?

TRUDI
Just two, but we were bloody lucky
to get outta there alive.

CHIEF LUCIEN
It is very troubling.

A CHEER pulls their attention. The SUV has been righted.

CHIEF LUCIEN (CONT'D)
It seems you are back in service.

TRUDI
Ace! Thanks heaps. Dunno what we
would've done without ya help.

CHIEF LUCIEN
It is no problem. Now, where is it
you are headed?

TRUDI
To a relief camp in Masisi.

CHIEF LUCIEN
Masisi is a long way and the roads
are very bad. You must travel part
of the way by foot or motorbike.

The Land Rover's starter grinds. Sylvestre gets out, gruffly
pops the hood, bangs on metal. Chief Lucien laughs.

CHIEF LUCIEN (CONT'D)
It appears you will not be going
anywhere tonight. I insist for you
to stay as our guests.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Sylvestre and Pascal stay behind to fix the Land Rover. Mia,
Trudi and Musa follow the children to the village. A girl
curiously touches Mia's blond hair. Emmanuel grabs her hand.

EMMANUEL
MONUC? MONUC?

MIA
MONUC? Sorry, I don't understand.

TRUDI
Reckon they reckon all us white
sheilas are from the UN.

Mia smiles at him.

MIA

No, not MONUC. I'm a nurse. My name is Mia. What's your name?

EMMANUEL

I am Emmanuel. You are American?

MIA

Yes, and Trudi is from Australia.

EMMANUEL

I very much love the America, but this Australia I do not know.

TRUDI

Crocodile Dundee? Shrimp on the Barbie?

(off his blank look)

No? How 'bout roo? Kangaroo?

Emmanuel's eyes brighten.

EMMANUEL

Oh, yes, kangaroo!

Emmanuel hops like a kangaroo. The other children join in. Mia and Trudi laugh. Allegra walks over, embarrassed.

ALLEGRA

Emmanuel, leave them in peace.

(to Mia and Trudi)

I am sorry. He is very talkative.

MIA

No, please, he's adorable.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - COURTYARD - NIGHT

Flames leap from a fire pit. Drums beat in a polyrhythmic frenzy. Mia and Trudi sit amid a circle of women. Trudi smiles at Nyassa's baby, HELENE, who shrieks in response.

NYASSA

She has never seen white skin.

A group of children run past, squealing. Tresor, the school teacher, chases them in a playful game of tag.

A TODDLER crawls towards Mia. MAMA EVANGELINE, 64, the village's esteemed matriarch, scoops him up.

MAMA EVANGELINE

Ah, my sweet little bird.

She nuzzle his neck. He laughs and wriggles off her lap. He holds up a toy car made of wire, cardboard and bottle caps.

MIA
That's a very nice car.

The boy crawls away, pushing the car in the dirt.

MIA (CONT'D)
Is he yours?

Mama Evangeline laughs and gestures towards the children.

MAMA EVANGELINE
They are all mine. I am
grandmother to all the children.
These are my people now. They take
me in when my own village shun me.

MIA
I'm not sure I understand.

MAMA EVANGELINE
As women, we are often blamed for
the tragedies that befall us.

She stares at the fire. A memory surfacing in the flames.

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)
It happen many year ago, but the
memory is still too fresh. I was
returning from the market with my
children. The rebels were hiding
in the bush, waiting. They kill
all my children, right in front of
me. I could do nothing but scream.
They take me to the forest. When I
go home, my husband, he will not
look at me. He say I disgrace him
and bring shame to my village.

MIA
I'm... so sorry. I can't imagine.

MAMA EVANGELINE
(turns to Mia)
Of course not. It is unimaginable.

They sit quietly as a group of women begin to dance.

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)
It is good that you come to Congo.
We have many trouble, many sadness
here. The world think we do not
suffer the same. Do not feel the
same pain. That we are somehow
accustomed to loss and death and
atrocious, but we are not.

MIA
How do you go on after something
that horrific?

Mama Evangeline gazes upon her adopted village.

MAMA EVANGELINE
It was very hard. At first, all I
want is to die. We go on because
there are others who need us.
(smiles at Mia)
And we dance. Because life can be
good sometimes, too. Come...

Taking Mia's hand, she leads her to the dancing women. Mia
surrenders to the rhythm, embracing this rare moment of joy.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - COURTYARD - LATER

The fire is reduced to embers. Villagers retire to their
huts. Chief Lucien walks with Trudi.

CHIEF LUCIEN
You must convince the men to stay.

TRUDI
I'll give it a burl, but
Sylvestre's a pig-headed bloke.

CHIEF LUCIEN
Pig head?

TRUDI
Stubborn, like a...

CHIEF LUCIEN
Ah, pig. Yes, I understand.

Mama Evangeline hands Mia a bag of food.

MAMA EVANGELINE
The men will be hungry.

MIA
Thank you. For everything.

Mama Evangeline takes Mia's hand.

MAMA EVANGELINE
Promise you will not forget us.

MIA
I could never forget you.

CHIEF LUCIEN
Be safe and stay on the path.

Mia, Trudi and Musa set off into the darkness. Mia looks back, strangely unsettled. Mama Evangeline waves.

EXT. LAND ROVER - NIGHT

Pascal digs under the hood, flashlight in his teeth. A piece of engine CLANKS to the ground. Sylvestre, dozing against the door, jolts awake.

SYLVESTRE

What was that?

PASCAL

Nothing. It is almost fixed.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - ZAWADI AND MUFUTA'S HUT - NIGHT

A full moon floats like a lantern over the peaceful village. Mufuta stands outside his hut, staring up at the jeweled night sky, his face filled with foreboding.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Musa shines a flashlight on the path. Mia and Trudi follow.

INT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - NEEMA AND CHRISTIAN'S HUT - NIGHT

Feet peek from under a thin blanket. Christian snores beside his TWO CHILDREN. Neema stares at a moonlit patch on the mud wall, where a BLACK WIDOW hovers near her sleeping infant.

EXT. JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

BLACK MILITARY BOOTS creep over the carpeted jungle floor.

INT. NEEMA AND CHRISTIAN'S HUT - CONTINUOUS

The black widow inches down the wall.

EXT. JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

A MACHETE silently slices through tangled brush.

INT. NEEMA AND CHRISTIAN'S HUT - CONTINUOUS

A FIST shoots out and crushes the spider.

EXT. LAND ROVER - NIGHT

Pascal appears from under the hood, grinning. He raises a greasy thumb in the air. A bullet pierces his forehead.

EXT. JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

The SOUND of the GUNSHOT halts Musa and the women in their tracks. Musa turns off the flashlight. Motions to be still.

EXT. LAND ROVER - NIGHT

SIX REBELS surround Sylvestre. They close in as he tries to run. One taunts him with a machete. Sylvestre spits in defiance as the machete SLICES THE AIR.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

They hear FOOTSTEPS behind them. Musa yells for the women to run. As they take off, GUNFIRE erupts. Musa cries out and falls. Mia turns back, drags him into the brush.

MUSA

You must... save yourself.

MIA

I won't leave you here.

MUSA

(coughs up blood)

It is... too late. You... must go.

The rebels draw closer. Musa pries his hand from hers.

MUSA (CONT'D)

Go!... Now!

Mia turns and runs. She hears SHOUTING followed by GUNFIRE. She flinches, but keeps running.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - NIGHT

Rebels destroy the village, dragging families from huts, shooting and hacking at them with machetes.

INT. / EXT. NEEMA AND CHRISTIAN'S HUT - NIGHT

Neema is nursing her baby when rebels burst in. The children scream. Christian leaps up and is mowed down.

A rebel wrenches the baby from Neema. She grabs the infant's leg, pleads with her eyes. He jerks the baby away, hoists it over his head. Her face twists in agony.

Neema is forced from her hut. She lets out a gut-wrenching wail as it's set aflame with her children inside.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - CHIEF LUCIEN'S HUT - NIGHT

Chief Lucien comes out, hands raised, into a hail of bullets.

INT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - ALLEGRA AND SOLOMON'S HUT - NIGHT

Emmanuel sleeps between his parents. Allegra's eyes pop open, sensing something. She hears GUNSHOTS, lunges at Solomon.

ALLEGRA
Solomon! Wake up! Wake up!

SOLOMON
What? What is it?

She yanks Emmanuel out of bed.

ALLEGRA
It is happening!

They hear terrified SHRIEKS and share a panicked look.

SOLOMON
We are finished!

ALLEGRA
Do not say that!

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - NIGHT

Nyassa runs with Helene strapped to her back. She's hit with a machete and crumbles to the ground.

INT. ZAWADI AND MUFUTA'S HUT - NIGHT

Bienvenu, an M16 at his back, looks away as Zawadi is raped. A YOUNG REBEL pokes him with the gun.

YOUNG REBEL
You watch. This is fun, no?

The young rebel laughs. Bienvenu blinks back tears. Mufuta tries to shield Omela from the violence. An OLDER REBEL snatches her from his arms, throws her to the ground.

MUFUTA
Please, no! She is a child.

OLDER REBEL
Tonight you make her a woman.

MUFUTA
(recoils)
She is my daughter.

OLDER REBEL
Do it or you die.

He presses the gun to Mufuta's chest. Omela stares in terror.
Mufuta's eyes brim with his love for her.

SOLOMON
I would die a thousand deaths
before harming my child.

Mufuta is shot. Omela screams. Bienvenu turns to stone.

INT. / EXT. ALLEGRA AND SOLOMON'S HUT - NIGHT

Allegra shoves Emmanuel out the door.

ALLEGRA
Run, Emmanuel! Deep into the
forest. I will find you.

Emmanuel is paralyzed by fear, then a bullet whizzes past his
head, and he takes off running as fast as he can.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - MAMA EVANGELINE'S HUT - NIGHT

Mama Evangeline steps outside, views the carnage. The light
in her eyes dims. Three rebels advance towards her.

MAMA EVANGELINE
Men like you kill my children.
Rape me with a gun. Nothing you do
can hurt me now.

They throw her to the ground. Her voice rises like a storm.

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)
I am your mother! I am your aunt!
I am your grandmother! I am your
sister! Where is your humanity?

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - NIGHT

Emmanuel ducks behind a tree. Sees his village in flames.
Bienvenu marched away at gunpoint.

He hears a baby CRYING. Searches the ground. Finds Nyassa close to death, Helene in the sling beside her. With her last ounce of strength, Nyassa pushes the infant towards him.

NYASSA

You are fast, Emmanuel. Take her!

INT. ALLEGRA AND SOLOMON'S HUT - NIGHT

Allegra stands against the wall while Solomon grips an ax. Rebels storm in, knocking him to the ground. The ax goes FLYING. Allegra reaches for it. A BOOT stomps on her hand.

Rebels beat Solomon. Allegra claws the dirt, her pregnant belly scraping the earth as she's dragged away.

ALLEGRA

Solomon!!

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Emmanuel runs with Helene strapped to his back, weaving through trees, hurtling over logs.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - NIGHT

Allegra and Solomon are restrained, eyes locked in terror. A rebel stabs Solomon in the gut. He falls to his knees. A kick to the chest hurtles him backwards into the newly dug trench.

All SOUND, including Allegra's SCREAMS, fades out. TRIBAL MUSIC comes up and remains until the following sequence ends.

SOLOMON'S POV: Staring up into the black night. Stars spin and swirl as the material world slips away.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Bienvenu is marched deeper into the bush and further from his home, tethered by rope to stolen boys and men.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Mia and Trudi flee through the moonlit darkness.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - NIGHT

Allegra weeps over Solomon's body.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Emmanuel lifts Helene from the sling. Blood trickles from her mouth, her eyes fixed in startled innocence.

EXT. PIT - NIGHT

Bienvenu is lowered into a pit with the other boys.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Emmanuel sobs, holds himself tightly, rocking back and forth.

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Shards of light shimmer through treetops. Birds sound early morning trills. Emmanuel sleeps, curled in a ball. He awakens suddenly and sits up, his gaze falling on Helene's body. He barely reacts, still numbed by the previous night's horror.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Mia is asleep against a tree. Trudi nudges her awake.

TRUDI

Crack of dawn, mate. Gotta shoot through, find a safe spot to hide.

Trudi scans their surroundings as Mia grabs her rucksack.

MIA

Which way should we go?

TRUDI

Let's have a crack at findin' the way back to the village. Reckon we can stay til we suss out a plan.

MIA

What about the drivers? Shouldn't we go look for them?

TRUDI

They can be anywhere. Too risky.

They set off, alert to every snapping twig and rustling leaf. They jump as a hare dashes past, exhale, and keep walking.

MIA
You think they're okay? The men?

TRUDI
Dunno. Sure hope so.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - DAY

Allegra stirs, tries to stand. A gentle hand pushes her back.

MAMA EVANGELINE
You must rest.

Mama Evangeline's face is bruised. Allegra tries again to rise, distraught.

ALLEGRA
Emmanuel! I must find him!

MAMA EVANGELINE
(restraining her)
You must think of the baby.

Allegra touches her belly.

ALLEGRA
It has not moved all night.

Her eyes turn with fresh torment to the sewer trench.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
Solomon! Oh God! Oh God! How could
this happen? Solomon!

Mama Evangeline takes in the devastation.

MAMA EVANGELINE
It happens because no one cares
enough to stop it.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Emmanuel covers Helene with leaves. He starts to walk in no particular direction. A tiny speck in a sea of green.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Mia and Trudi follow a narrow trail. Mia finds Musa's flashlight in the brush, clicks it on and off.

MIA
At least we know we're headed in
the right direction.

As they walk, Trudi catches her peering into the bushes.

TRUDI
Nothin' ya could've done.

MIA
I left him there to die alone.

TRUDI
If ya didn't, ya would've carked
it too.

MIA
He was only here because of us.

TRUDI
We didn't kill him, Mia. If it
wasn't us, it would've been some
other bugger. He knew the risks.

Further down the trail, Trudi stops abruptly.

MIA
What is it?

TRUDI
Smoke seems stronger round here.

Fear flashes across Mia's face.

MIA
The village!

EXT. TREE LINE / VILLAGE - DAY

Lingering smoke obscures the landscape. As they move towards the village, corpses materialize in the patchy haze like specters. Trudi retches, shoots Mia a grave look.

MIA
They could've hid... or escaped.

They press on, in dread of what they'll find. The village feels ghostly, like the dead are stumbling around lost and confused. As the air clears, they stare ahead in disbelief.

TRUDI
Bloody hell...

The earth smolders where huts once stood. They find Mama Evangeline and Allegra in the courtyard, huddled around Neema, who appears nearly catatonic from shock. Mama Evangeline looks up, dazed. Mia reacts to her battered face.

MAMA EVANGELINE
 She will not speak. They kill her
 husband, her children.

Allegra buries her face in her hands.

ALLEGRA
 Oh God! Why? Why?

MAMA EVANGELINE
 They kill Solomon, too.

MIA
 Her son, Emmanuel...

MAMA EVANGELINE
 He escape to the forest.

MIA
 Thank God. And the others?

MAMA EVANGELINE
 We do not know. They kill many.

Mia notices Allegra's skirt stained with blood.

MIA
 You're bleeding.

ALLEGRA
 The baby I think is no more.

Mama Evangeline's eyes ignite in fury.

MAMA EVANGELINE
 They rape us all! She eight month
 pregnant. They do not care. It is
 curse to be woman in Congo.

MIA
 We need to get you someplace safe.

MAMA EVANGELINE
 There is no place safe, and I am
 too tired of the running. You take
 them and leave me here to die.

MIA
 We're not going to leave you.

MAMA EVANGELINE
 You do not understand! They hunt
 us like animal. Soldier come every
 day to my village to rape and
 steal. They take everything. We
 have nothing left but still they
 come. They kill my children. Rape
 (MORE)

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)
and beat me until I am half dead.
I hide in the forest, but they are
everywhere -- army, rebel, you
cannot tell one from the other.
But it does not matter because all
the soldier steal, all the soldier
rape, all the soldier kill. And I,
I am too tired of the running.

Mia's words feel hollow even as she speaks them.

MIA
We can get you help.

MAMA EVANGELINE
There is no help. The world has
forgotten us.

Mama Evangeline turns away to tend to Neema. Trudi motions
for Mia to follow her. They step out of earshot.

TRUDI
She's spot on. They're on their
own. Nobody gives a bloody damn.

MIA
We can't just leave them here.

TRUDI
'Course not. Rebels will be back
soon enough to finish 'em off.

Mia notices Allegra grimace in pain.

MIA
How long you think it would take
to get to the camp from here?

TRUDI
On foot? Reckon five, six days.

MIA
That's too far in her condition.
What are our other options?

TRUDI
We're outta options, mate.

MIA
And what about Emmanuel? He's just
a little boy. We can't leave him
out there in the jungle all alone.

TRUDI
If he even got that far.

The thought crushes Mia. They return to the women.

MIA

Do you know the way to Masisi?

MAMA EVANGELINE

I was there once many years ago.

MIA

There's a clinic at the refugee camp. We can get you help, but we'll never find it on our own.

MAMA EVANGELINE

I am sorry. I cannot help you.

MIA

Allegra needs a doctor.

MAMA EVANGELINE

I will not leave my home again.

MIA

She and her baby could die. Please, you've all lost so much. We have to do everything we can to save them, but we can't do it without your help.

Mama Evangeline is quiet. She looks from Allegra to Neema.

MAMA EVANGELINE

There is another clinic that is closer. I will take you there.

MIA

Thank you.

TRUDI

We gotta move quickly then.

ALLEGRA

No, I cannot leave without Emmanuel! I must find him first.

MIA

We can search along the way. I'm sure we'll find him.

Mia helps her up. Mama Evangeline speaks softly to Neema.

MAMA EVANGELINE

The rebels will return. It is not safe for us to stay here.

She touches Neema's arm, breaking the trance. Neema wails, pounding the earth with her fists.

NEEMA

No!!! I cannot leave them! My
children! I cannot leave them!

Mia turns away, ashen.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - CEMETERY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Mia clings to Cole's casket. Noah and Regina gently pry her
hands off until she reluctantly lets go.

EXT. HILLSIDE VILLAGE - DAY (PRESENT)

As Mama Evangeline calms Neema, Trudi approaches Mia.

TRUDI

Ya alright there?

MIA

Yeah, I was feeling lightheaded.

TRUDI

(indicating Neema)

She seems better now. We should
probably get a move on.

They join the other woman. Standing shoulder to shoulder,
their eyes scan the wreckage. Mia spots the toddler's TOY CAR
in the dirt. It's wrenching.

MAMA EVANGELINE

There is nothing more for us here.
It is time for us to go.

INT. IDP CAMP - OFFICE - DAY

Regina looks up from her laptop as BRIDGET, 30, enters.

BRIDGET

They found the truck but not the
driver. He never made it there.

REGINA

Then where the hell are they?

BRIDGET

We don't know.

REGINA

Call the embassy and organize a
search team.

BRIDGET

They've blocked all the main roads
so no one can get in or out.

REGINA

We can't just abandon them in the
middle of a fucking war zone!

BRIDGET

I'm sorry, Regina. There's nothing
we can do until they lift the
restrictions. I'll let you know
the minute something changes.

Bridget leaves. Regina closes her laptop.

REGINA

Jesus, Mia. Where are you?

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

TWO LINES of men and boys march through the jungle at
gunpoint, hauling heavy supply packs. Tresor falls in step
with Bienvenu, whispers furtively.

TRESOR

First chance, you must run.

They lock eyes briefly. A BOY in front trips and drops his
pack, causing a commotion. Tresor slips into the trees.
Moments later, two rebels drag him back. His fearful eyes
again meet Bienvenu's.

ADONIS, 28, mouth scarred by a bullet wound, runs his finger
along a machete's edge.

ADONIS

You are Mai-Mai now. Soldiers
until death. You will see the
consequence of those who dare to
defy their destiny.

He points to a BOY in a red shirt.

ADONIS (CONT'D)

You, come here.

The boy nervously steps forward. Adonis hands him the blade.

ADONIS (CONT'D)

Chop him to pieces. We will drink
his blood and feast on his flesh.

The boy's eyes shift between Adonis and Tresor.

RED SHIRT

But... he has done nothing to me.

Adonis shoots him, leaving the other boys horrified. He points to FRANCOIS, 14.

ADONIS

Do you wish the same fate as your friend here?

Francois shakes his head, takes the machete, hesitates.

ADONIS (CONT'D)

It is you or him.

TRESOR

Please, don't...

Francois lifts the machete, shuts his eyes. Tresor lets out a blood-curdling shriek as Francois swings.

EXT. JUNGLE - LATER

As they continue their bleak journey, Francois picks at dried blood on his shirt. Bienvenu whispers to the BOY ahead.

BIENVENU

What will happen to us?

SADIKI, 15, keeps his eyes glued to the path.

SADIKI

They will make killers of us all.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

As Emmanuel walks barefoot through thorny brush, his ankle catches in a vine. He falls and hears HISSING. A BLACK MAMBA coils just feet away. He rips at the vine and frees his foot. The snake suddenly rears up. Emmanuel scrambles backwards, then takes off running, tripping over branches.

EXT. DRY RIVERBED - DAY

Emmanuel digs in a dry riverbed. A dark puddle forms. He strains the gritty liquid through his teeth.

As he continues walking, a TINY FIGURE comes into focus. XAVIER, 5, fans flies from his mother's lifeless body. He stares vacantly as Emmanuel approaches.

EMMANUEL

Is that your mama?

Xavier nods.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)
She won't wake up?

Xavier shakes his head, goes back to fanning the flies.
Emmanuel watches for a moment, then extends his hand.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)
Come, I will look after you.

Xavier looks up, then takes Emmanuel's hand. Together, they
set off through the forest. Xavier glances back as his
mother's body fades from view.

WOMEN (PRELAP)
Emmanuel! Emmanuel!

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The women press through thick reeds, searching for Emmanuel.

ALLEGRA
I should not have let him go.

MAMA EVANGELINE
It was his best chance to survive.

ALLEGRA
He will be so frightened. He has
never been alone in the forest.

MIA & NEEMA
Emmanuel! Emmanuel!

As they search, despair settles over them like heavy mist.

ALLEGRA
They did not even have a proper
burial. What will happen to them
when they reach the next world?

NEEMA
Their spirits will be trapped.
They will wander the earth and
keep us from peace.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The sweltering heat has left the women sluggish. Every step
is grueling. Mia sips from a canteen, passes it around.

MIA
We're almost out of water.

MAMA EVANGELINE
There should be a well on the way.

Allegra moans.

MIA
What's wrong?

ALLEGRA
I do not know.

MIA
Are you having contractions?

She shakes her head, doubles over in pain.

ALLEGRA
The baby... is dead inside me.

MIA
We don't know that for certain.

TRUDI
(to Mama Evangeline)
How much further, ya reckon?

MAMA EVANGELINE
Maybe eight, nine kilometer.

TRUDI
Why don't we take a breather? Make
sure she's all good.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Bienvenu stops to adjust his pack. JOBERT, 22, jabs him hard with his rifle, almost knocking it off.

JOBERT
Keep moving!

A YOUNG BOY bursts into tears.

YOUNG BOY
I am hungry. I want to go home.

JOBERT
This is your home now.

EXT. GLADE - DAY

The women take refuge in a glade. Trudi doles out some jerky.

TRUDI
This is the last of it, so bog in.

They each take a piece, but Neema refuses.

MAMA EVANGELINE
Eat, you need your strength.

Neema breaks down, sobbing.

NEEMA
Why do they not kill me? Why do I
live when my children perish?

MAMA EVANGELINE
Your children are free of this
world and its pain. They no longer
suffer. Find comfort in that.

NEEMA
I have no life without them.

Mama Evangeline pulls her in close.

MAMA EVANGELINE
It is unbearable, I know, but you
will bear it. However long the
night, the dawn will break. Life
continues, and so must we.

Allegra discreetly alerts them to nearby movement. They
swiftly retreat into the surrounding brush.

COLONEL NGANDU, 38, leads the stolen boys. He hears something
and halts. Bienvenu catches a splash of color in the leaves.
Sees the frightened women staring back.

Allegra stifles a GROAN. Colonel Ngandu's head snaps around.
The women freeze as he moves in their direction. Bienvenu's
supplies suddenly CLATTER to the ground. Jobert kicks him.

JOBERT
Stupid boy. Pick it up, fast.

As he gathers his supplies, he points away from the women.

BIENVENU
I saw someone hiding over there.

Colonel Ngandu raises his AK, scans the trees, signals the
boys to follow. Bienvenu steals a glance back at the women.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

- An okapi grazes on leaves. Two young bonobos wrestle in the
grass. A pangolin shuffles along a tree branch.

- The women battle both time and the elements as they journey
through vast stretches of untamed wilderness.

- Emmanuel helps Xavier climb over a fallen tree.
- The stolen boys venture deeper into the forest, each step eroding all hope of escape.

PRE-LAP: The sound of RUSHING WATER.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The stolen boys stand at the edge of a swift moving river.

JOBERT
You will cross like soldiers and
keep your supplies dry.

The rebels prod them with guns. They wade in, packs held high. A PANICKED BOY digs in his heels.

PANICKED BOY
No, I cannot swim!

JOBERT
You are Mai-Mai. No harm will come
to you. Water is our protector.

Jobert shoves him in the river. He thrashes, grabs another boy, pulls him under.

Bienvenu tenses as the water hits his chest. Midway across, he spots a CROCODILE on the opposite bank. He turns to go back, but rebels stand ready to shoot.

As tired boys sink beneath the surface, he hears someone call for help. Sadiki flails a few yards ahead. Eyes glued to the croc, he fights the current to reach him.

BIENVENU
Here, take my arm!

Sadiki clings to Bienvenu as they struggle against the tide. Bienvenu's pack slips. He reaches out as it floats away. When he turns back, the CROC is gone from the bank.

He hears a SCREAM and loud SPLASH. Turns to see a boy CAUGHT IN THE CROC'S JAWS and dragged underwater.

BIENVENU (CONT'D)
Kick harder!

SADIKI
I am... too weak.

BIENVENU
Do you want to be eaten?!

They reach the shore and hoist themselves onto the bank. They roll onto their backs, breathing hard, staring up at the sky.

SADIKI
I... am... Sadiki.

BIENVENU
I am... Bienvenu.

SADIKI
Thank you for saving me, Bienvenu.

The rebels shout for the surviving boys to form a line.

BIENVENU
I think only God can save us now.

EXT. RIVER BANK - JUNGLE - DAY

The CRACK of a WHIP on a bare back. Bienvenu stoically endures the beating. Sadiki flinches at each lash.

JOBERT
Now you will haul double.

Bienvenu is dragged to his feet, loaded with extra gear.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Silhouetted against the setting sun, the women lumber past a withered manioc field. Mia hunches over, grabs her knees.

MIA
This humidity's unbearable.

MAMA EVANGELINE
We are almost there.

Trudi swats furiously at mosquitoes.

TRUDI
These bloody mozzies are driving
me bonkers!

Neema rolls her eyes, speaks in Swahili, SUBTITLED:

NEEMA
*Why did we even bring these women?
We do not need their help. They do
not know our land or our people.*

MAMA EVANGELINE
*We are stronger together, and they
would never survive on their own.*

They move through low scrub and down a dust-choked path.
Neema squints at something in the distance. END SUBTITLES.

NEEMA
It is there, up ahead.

MIA
Thank God.

They arrive at the well. Neema pulls the lever, but nothing happens. The broken pump nearly breaks them.

MIA (CONT'D)
Great, what do we do now?

TRUDI
We've still got about an hour of
daylight. I reckon we push on.

Neema's had enough.

NEEMA
It is not for you to decide.

TRUDI
I only meant...

NEEMA
I do not care what you meant.

Mama Evangeline steps in.

MAMA EVANGELINE
It is probably best to stop now.
Night falls quickly in the jungle.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Bats flutter through the trees. Emmanuel clears away twigs from the base of a log and lies beside Xavier.

EMMANUEL
Are you scared?

Xavier nods.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)
When I was little, whenever I was
scared, my mama would sing to me.
(sings in Lingala,
subtitled)
Baby so small, baby so small,
hush now, don't you cry.
Tell me what's wrong, I'll take
care of you. You are safe now,
close your eyes. Hush, hush a bye.

They fall asleep to the rasp of frogs, buzz of cicadas, and chilling howls of unseen creatures.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

The women are asleep, except for Mia. She gazes up at distant stars, fighting the deep ache in her heart.

MIA
I can still feel you near me.

A meteor streaks across the night sky, leaving a glowing trail in its wake. She whispers into the void:

MIA (CONT'D)
Is that you, Cole?

INT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

A hidden camp deep in the jungle. MAI-MAI REBELS, dressed in street clothes, wander barefoot and drunk.

YOUNG GIRLS cook and serve COMMANDERS, who drink and laugh around small fire pits, casting the camp in an orange glow.

Sadiki steps from the shadows, sits beside Bienvenu.

SADIKI
This will help.

He places a poultice of wet leaves on Bienvenu's raw back.

SADIKI (CONT'D)
I am sorry they beat you.

BIENVENU
It is not your fault.

SADIKI
If you had not helped me, you
would still have your pack.

BIENVENU
And you would have drowned.

Sadiki looks around the camp.

SADIKI
I do not think these men are real
soldiers. If we stay here, I am
certain they will kill us.

BIENVENU
If we try to escape and they catch
us, they will kill us then, too.

SADIKI

It is better to take that chance.

BIENVENU

How, when they are everywhere?

A GIRL walks by dragging two large buckets. Sadiki stares like he's just seen a ghost.

SADIKI

Solange?

Solange's eyes spark to life when she sees Sadiki.

SADIKI (CONT'D)

Is it really you? How can this be?

A rough hand grabs her arm. Colonel Ngandu leers at her.

COLONEL NGANDU

You are mine tonight.

Solange looks back in despair as she's dragged away.

BIENVENU

How do you know this girl?

SADIKI

She is from my uncle's village.
She disappear many months ago.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

A FLASHLIGHT BEAM snakes across the ground and lands on the two sleeping boys. Emmanuel jerks awake, stares up at a ghoulis face in the eerie light.

LT. BAHATI

Do not be afraid.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Dawn breaks and Allegra's eyes spring open. Her hand moves to her belly. She yelps, waking Mia.

MIA

What is it? Is the pain worse?

ALLEGRA

No, the baby, it moved! Here, give me your hand.

Mia sits up and lays her hand on Allegra's belly. Her mouth falls open and they both laugh, rousing the others.

TRUDI
What's goin' on?

MIA
The baby moved!

NEEMA
The baby moved?

ALLEGRA
Yes, I felt it again just now!

They gather and touch Allegra's belly, laughing and marveling at the kicking life within.

EXT. / INT. FDLR CAMP - DAY

Emmanuel and Xavier follow LT. BAHATI, 38, battle-worn, but far less sinister in the softer morning light.

LT. BAHATI
It is lucky I found you. You will
be safe here, and you will have
enough food to fill your bellies.

They cross a hidden bridge that leads to a secret encampment, where uniformed rebels run drills. They are FDLR, Hutu rebels who fled to DRC after the 1994 Rwandan genocide. They are more organized than the Mai-Mai, but equally ruthless.

INT. FDLR CAMP - DAY

Lt. Bahati watches the boys devour their food.

LT. BAHATI
I neglected to ask your names.

EMMANUEL
I am Emmanuel.

LT. BAHATI
(to Xavier)
And you?

EMMANUEL
He does not speak.

LT. BAHATI
No? Why is that?

Emmanuel shrugs. Lt. Bahati smiles.

LT. BAHATI (CONT'D)
Perhaps he has not much to say.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The punishing heat drains the women. Mia and Neema can barely hold Allegra up. Suddenly, an OBJECT falls from the sky and lands at their feet with a THUD.

MIA
What the...?

They look up, amazed to find COCONUT TREES, along with several coconuts strewn across the ground.

ALLEGRA
It's a miracle.

MIA
Like manna from heaven.

TRUDI
Heaven or not, I'll take it.

They spring into action, quickly gathering the coconuts.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Emmanuel and Xavier each carry large canvas sacks. They trail behind Lt. Bahati, who glances back and shakes his head.

LT. BAHATI
What do children know of machetes
and murder and the madness of men?

They drop the sacks by a blue tarpaulin.

LT. BAHATI (CONT'D)
You should be home with your
families, and in school, so you
can fix this mess we have made.

He rolls up his sleeves, slices open the sacks. Emmanuel gapes at the jagged scars encircling his elbows.

EMMANUEL
What happened to your arms?

LT. BAHATI
(regarding his arms)
Some years ago, rebels came to my
village and offered me a position
with their militia. When they
began cutting off my arms, I
accepted. Good decision, I think.

EMMANUEL
I think so, too.

LT. BAHATI

That is the last time I saw my family. My son, he was not much older than you. It is too sad this life. I pray one day things will be different for you.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The forest stretches endlessly in all directions. Mama Evangeline spins around, trying to orient herself.

MAMA EVANGELINE

I am no longer certain of the way.

Trudi looks up at the sky and points east.

TRUDI

The sun rose from over there. We need to keep heading north.

Each step drains Allegra's strength. She clutches Mia.

MIA

Hold on, just a little longer.

Allegra manages a weak nod.

INT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - DAY

Bienvenu takes a deep pull off a joint, slips into euphoria.

BASHI

Feel good, yes?

BASHI, 17, wiry, with blood-shot eyes, grins knowingly.

BASHI (CONT'D)

Special herb make you crazy. You forget your name, home, everything. You hear gunshot, you chase it like lion chase gazelle.

He hangs a drain plug over Bienvenu's neck, places a garland of vines on his head

BASHI (CONT'D)

Leaf make you invisible. Necklace keep you safe from bullet.

He lifts his shirt. A web of scars crisscross his chest.

BASHI (CONT'D)

See? Bullet pass through like water. I am hundred percent good.

(MORE)

BASHI (CONT'D)
Mai-Mai magic is very strong.
Nothing harm you if you believe.

EXT. TREE LINE / CLEARING - DAY

The women crest a hill. The tree line looms up ahead.

MAMA EVANGELINE
I remember now. The clinic is just
beyond those trees.

Mia squeezes Allegra's arm at this new surge of hope.

MIA
See, we're almost there.

They make their way to the forest's edge. The clinic sits at the far end of an overgrown clearing. A long line of people wait out front. They pause a moment, overcome with emotion. Allegra leans against Mia, ready to collapse.

ALLEGRA
We made it.

MIA
We did.

They begin wading through waist-high grass. Midway, they hear VEHICLES approaching. TWO WHITE PICKUPS barrel through the brush. The sight of U.N. SEALS fills them with relief.

TRUDI
Well, I'll be stuffed.

The trucks screech to a sudden halt. The occupants jump out and OPEN FIRE on the waiting patients. The women take cover, cowering at the sound of GUNFIRE, SCREAMS and BREAKING GLASS.

The shooting finally subsides. Moments later, they hear the trucks pulling away. Trudi cautiously peers over the grass.

TRUDI (CONT'D)
I reckon they're gone.

They rise unsteadily. Something in Mia snaps. She turns to Neema and Mama Evangeline.

MIA
You two, stay here with Allegra.
(to Trudi)
You, come with me.

She strides purposefully towards the clinic. Glances back to find Trudi still rooted in place.

MIA (CONT'D)
You coming or what?

Trudi sighs, reluctantly follows.

TRUDI
Mia, what are ya doin'?

MIA
I refuse to sit and watch her die.

TRUDI
Fine, but... just hang on a sec.

Mia spins around to face her.

MIA
I'm done waiting. I'm done with
all of this. No one should have to
live this way.

She sees the women standing together like broken statues.

MIA (CONT'D)
Look at them. How do they even
breathe? How do they not just
fucking fall over dead from grief?

TRUDI
They're still alive. And where
there's life, there's hope.

MIA
Hope for what? They've lost
everything! Their homes, their
children. When you lose a child,
there is no hope. There's nothing!

TRUDI
Mia...

MIA
We can't give up! We can't let
Allegra and her baby die!

Trudi grips her shoulders, faces her squarely.

TRUDI
Don't go all wobbly on me now.
Nobody's throwin' in the towel.
We're gonna do everything we can
to save 'em. Okay?

Mia inhales deeply, regains her composure.

MIA
Okay.

TRUDI

Okay. Let's do this then.

They approach the building. It's deathly quiet. They glance at each other, brace themselves, then step inside.

INT. RURAL CLINIC - DAY.

The floor is slick with blood and covered in broken glass.

TRUDI

Jesus...

Mangled bodies everywhere. Mia searches for survivors.

MIA

They're all dead. Check every drawer, every shelf. Grab anything that looks useful.

Trudi opens a cabinet, it's wiped clean. They scour closets, desks, bins. Trudi finds gauze and iodine. Mia moves a stack of papers, underneath is a SAT PHONE.

MIA (CONT'D)

Trudi! A phone!

INT. IDP CAMP - OFFICE - DAY

Harried workers hunch over laptops and speak urgently on headsets. Regina's voice cracks with emotion over the phone.

REGINA

Thank God you're okay. I've been worried sick. Where are you now?

INT. RURAL CLINIC - INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

MIA

We're at a clinic, some rural area, not sure exactly where. It's been shot up. No survivors. We have three women with us. One's pregnant, in really bad shape. She needs medical care ASAP.

REGINA

We have a mobile team stationed at an IDP camp in Minova. Is there a way you can get her there?

MIA

She'll never make it that far. What about the driver you sent?

REGINA

No one's seen or heard from him in days. It's awful, Mia. Fighting's broken out everywhere. It's a total fucking clusterfuck.

MIA

Fuck!

REGINA

I know. I'm so sorry. I promise I'll send someone out to find you as soon as things stabilize.

MIA

We don't have that kind of time.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Mia and Trudi head back across the clearing. Allegra is on the ground in terrible pain. Mama Evangeline cradles her head. Neema fans her with a palm leaf. Mia checks her vitals.

MIA

What happened?

NEEMA

There is more blood.

Mama Evangeline looks hopefully at Mia.

MAMA EVANGELINE

The people from the clinic?

Mia shakes her head. Mama Evangeline's face sinks.

TRUDI

We shouldn't hang around here, we're way too exposed. Give me a hand to get her up.

Allegra moans as they lift her.

NEEMA

Where are we going?

MIA

We need to get her to Masisi.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Mai-Mai are on the prowl. Bienvenu and Sadiki shoulder AKs, stoned out of their gourds. The trees expand and contract, the sky pulsates in a dizzying prism.

EXT. CASSAVA FIELD - DAY

A FATHER and TWO SONS, 9 and 11, dig with shovels, laughing.

9 YEAR-OLD
He was washing in the creek and
the monkey stole his pants.

11 YEAR-OLD
It had them on its head!

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Adonis peers through the leaves at the father and sons. He
nods to Colonel Ngandu, raises his rifle.

EXT. CASSAVA FIELD - DAY

Bullets RIP HOLES IN THE EARTH inches from their feet. Mai-
Mai burst from the trees. Adonis aims his gun at the father.
Colonel Ngandu grabs the shovels from the boys.

COLONEL NGANDU
I see you have been blessed with
two strong sons. Which will you
keep and which will you sacrifice?

FATHER
I... I cannot make such a choice.

COLONEL NGANDU
You wish for both to die?

FATHER
No, please, I will give you...

Adonis shoots him in the head. The sons scream hysterically.
Colonel Ngandu shakes his head.

COLONEL NGANDU
Indecision always get you killed.

He hands the shovels to Bienvenu and Sadiki.

COLONEL NGANDU (CONT'D)
Shoot them and bury their bodies.

Neither one moves. Adonis levels his rifle at them.

ADONIS
Do it, or you will become dust.

Sadiki bellows as they both fire their weapons. Blood sprays
Bienvenu's face.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The women emerge from a thicket. Mia and Trudi sweat and strain under Allegra's weight.

TRUDI
I need to take five.

MIA
Best idea I've heard all day.

They find a spot in the shade and ease Allegra to the ground.

ALLEGRA
I am sorry to be a burden.

MIA
Hey, we're all in this mess together. No need to be sorry.

TRUDI
Reckon, just days ago we were complete strangers, and now...

MAMA EVANGELINE
Now our destinies are intertwined.

TRUDI
Yeah, but to what end?

MAMA EVANGELINE
That part we do not know.

As they quietly ponder their fate, a FLOCK OF BIRDS bursts from the treetops, followed by distant GUNFIRE.

NEEMA
This time they will kill us all!

They frantically pull Allegra to her feet. She gasps, staring down at a puddle on the ground. Her water just broke.

ALLEGRA
No, this cannot be happening.

Stunned silence, then Mia wraps Allegra's arm around her shoulder. Neema takes her other arm and, together, they half-drag, half-carry her.

MAMA EVANGELINE
Quick! We must hide!

MIA
Whatever you do, do not push!

GUNSHOTS grow louder. A wild-eyed WOMAN runs towards them.

WILD-EYED WOMAN

Run! They are killing everyone!

They race through the forest. Smoke from a burning village seeps into the air. They hear more GUNFIRE, closer this time.

ALLEGRA

Oh, no! The baby... it is coming!

MIA

No! You can't have that baby now!

MAMA EVANGELINE

This way! Hurry! Over here!

Mama Evangeline leads them into a thick copse of trees. Allegra leans back against Neema, moaning. Mia kneels between her legs, laser-focused as Allegra twists in pain.

MIA

Hold on! Don't push! Don't push!
The baby's shoulders are stuck!

Sweat pours down Mia's face as she works to rotate the baby. Allegra screams. Neema claps a hand over her mouth.

MIA (CONT'D)

I know it hurts. Just hang on.
We're almost there. Just a little
more. Breathe. Okay, now push.

Allegra's face contorts in agony. Seconds later, the NEWBORN'S CRY is subsumed by the surrounding tumult. Mia gazes in wonder at the tiny, slippery life in her hands.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Mai-Mai haul stolen loot back to camp. Bienvenu and Sadiki, off their high, are ravaged by what they've seen and done.

BIENVENU

Why we are here? I mean, what are
we even fighting for?

SADIKI

We are fighting to stay alive.

BIENVENU

This is not life. Death would be
more like living than this.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

The women sit around Allegra, admiring the baby.

MIA
She's so beautiful.

ALLEGRA
She has Solomon's nose and, I
think, Emmanuel's eyes.

MIA
And what does she have of yours?

Allegra thinks a moment.

ALLEGRA
She has my spirit.

INT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

The camp is quiet. Bienvenu lies on his back beside Sadiki,
staring up into the darkness.

BIENVENU
Sadiki?

SADIKI
(sleepily)
Umm...

BIENVENU
Are you awake?

Sadiki opens his eyes, yawns.

SADIKI
Yes, I am awake.

BIENVENU
When you close your eyes, what do
you see?

Sadiki closes his eyes, conjures a happy memory.

SADIKI
I see my mother. I see her smile.
I feel her kiss me on my forehead.

Sadiki turns his head towards Bienvenu.

SADIKI (CONT'D)
What do you see?

BIENVENU
I see the boys we killed. They are
shouting at me, "Why are you
killing me? I have done nothing.
You have killed me for nothing."

INT. FDLR CAMP - DAY

Emmanuel and Xavier stir giant pots over fire pits. Lt. Bahati speaks with a COMMANDER, glances over at the boys.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

HEAVILY ARMED FDLR slink through the forest. Emmanuel, Xavier and a dozen children follow, laden with bandoliers of ammo.

Lt. Bahati waits until no one is watching, then slips behind a tree. He pulls Emmanuel and Xavier aside as they pass.

LT. BAHATI

At the first gunshot, you must
fall to the ground and pretend you
are dead. Do you understand?

They stare at him blankly. They don't understand a thing.

LT. BAHATI (CONT'D)

Tell me you understand.

Emmanuel nods, obediently.

LT. BAHATI (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I could not protect you.

He leaves to rejoin the other leaders.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

An FDLR rebel returns from a STAND OF TREES. He nods to the Commander, who addresses the children.

COMMANDER

Okay, little warriors. The enemy
is behind these trees. You must
scare them off by running and
shouting as loud as you can.

A NERVOUS BOY asks the obvious.

NERVOUS BOY

But what if they shoot us?

The Commander smiles, reassuringly.

COMMANDER

Children are blessed with special
protections. The bullets cannot
harm you. And, as a reward,
whoever shouts the loudest will be
given extra rations this evening.

A few children seem doubtful, but all are starving, and most would do anything for food. Xavier clings to Emmanuel.

EMMANUEL

He does not talk! He cannot shout!

The Commander walks over to Xavier.

COMMANDER

He does not talk?

Emmanuel shakes his head. The Commander removes a silver WHISTLE from his pocket and slips it over Xavier's head.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)

Then blow as hard as you can.

Emmanuel turns to Lt. Bahati, who will not meet his gaze. A BOY starts to cry.

CRYING BOY

I do not want to go. I am afraid.

The Commander's face turns to stone.

COMMANDER

Run, or I will shoot you myself.

EXT. STAND OF TREES - MOMENTS LATER

The children run and shout. Xavier blows the WHISTLE.

EXT. OPPOSITE ANGLE - STAND OF TREES - CONTINUOUS

The children erupt from the trees into a clearing and a CANNON OF GUNFIRE. Tiny bodies crash to the earth. Emmanuel's eyes search desperately for Xavier. They find him --

EMMANUEL

No!!!

The WHISTLE flies from Xavier's hand. It ARCS THROUGH THE AIR and falls to the ground in SLO-MO.

EXT. STAND OF TREES - MOMENTS LATER

FDLR rebels trample over children, firing at the other group.

Emmanuel curls into a fetal position and shuts his eyes, quivering against the warm bodies of slaughtered children.

EXT. JUNGLE - LATER

Emmanuel moves an arm draped over his head. He crawls out from a tangle of twisted limbs, covered in blood, but unhurt. He searches for Xavier and finds him among the corpses, his black, bottomless eyes staring up at the sky.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Emmanuel wanders the forest, his slender body heaving with sobs. He sits against a tree and sings to comfort himself.

EMMANUEL
(in Lingala, subtitled)
Baby so small, Baby so small,
hush now, don't you cry,
Tell me what's wrong...

INT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Bashi dances in a raffia skirt and headdress to the music in his head. Bienvenu, drunk on palm wine, sits with the other boys and fingers a grenade.

They pass around a joint. Bienvenu takes a long hit, stands, and juggles the grenade like a soccer ball, bouncing it off his head, arms and legs. They all think it's hilarious.

INT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Solange runs shrieking from a tent, Colonel Ngandu in close pursuit. She darts around the trees. He catches her and lifts her by her hair.

COLONEL NGANDU
Running from me is the last
mistake you will make.

INT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Bienvenu is pissing on a tree when he hears WHIMPERING. He follows the noise and finds Solange, tightly bound to a stake behind Colonel Ngandu's tent.

SOLANGE
Help me, please! He will kill me!

He briefly hesitates, then checks that no one is watching, and begins untying her. Solange studies him closely.

SOLANGE (CONT'D)
You are Sadiki's friend.

BIENVENU

Yes.

He hears rustling, turns to find Bashi standing there.

BASHI

What are you doing?

BIENVENU

The rope was loose. I thought she might escape.

BASHI

(taps his head)

Smart... but you better hurry. You and Sadiki are on night watch.

Bashi walks off, his raffia skirt swishing behind him. Bienvenu steps away from Solange.

BIENVENU

They will know it was me.

SOLANGE

Do not leave me here!

BIENVENU

I have no choice. I am sorry.

He walks away with regret. Solange breaks down in sobs.

EXT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Sadiki's flashlight cuts through the dark as he and Bienvenu patrol the area. Sadiki pauses, resolute.

SADIKI

We have go back and save her.

BIENVENU

He saw me with her.

SADIKI

Bashi is too far gone to remember. He may not even know it was you.

BIENVENU

It is too dangerous. Ngandu is probably back at his tent by now.

Sadiki's shoulders sag.

SADIKI

No one can ever escape this place.

EXT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - LATER

Bienvenu and Sadiki keep watch outside the camp.

BIENVENU
My father would tell us the
funniest stories. We would laugh
so hard, tears would spring from
our eyes. My sister, Omela, once
she started, she could not stop,
and that would make us laugh even
harder. Now, it is all...

His voice trails off.

SADIKI
It is better to forget your life
from before. It is a ghost life.

BIENVENU
I always wished to make my father
proud. I wonder what he would
think of me now?

SADIKI
My father would say, "you have
become a killer just like them and
have brought shame to the family."

Bienvenu sighs, stares into the blackness.

BIENVENU
I do not understand this life.

They listen to a nocturnal choir of insects. Bienvenu yawns.

SADIKI
You can sleep. I am not so tired.

Bienvenu leans back against a log and closes his eyes,
smiling wistfully as he remembers the laughter.

EXT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - LATER

Bienvenu sleeps, clutching his gun. VOICES haunt his dreams.
His face twitches painfully.

HAUNTING VOICES (V.O.)
Why are you killing me?... You are
killing me for nothing...

Sadiki hears a NOISE and wanders off to investigate. He
shines the flashlight around the trees.

EXT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

A loud CRACK wakes Bienvenu. He leaps up. Too dark to see.

BIENVENU
Sadiki? Sadiki, where are you?

The forest suddenly ERUPTS WITH GUNFIRE. Bullets streak through the night like meteors. He dives for cover.

INT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

FDLR ambush the hideout. Jolted from sleep, the Mai-Mai scramble to defend their turf. Sounds of SCREAMS and GUNFIRE reverberate through the night air.

INT. MAI-MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Fighting her restraints, Solange frees a hand, unties the other, thrashing like an animal as an FDLR rebel approaches.

He slices the binds on her feet, throws her to the ground and climbs on top of her. Her fingers desperately probe the earth. She finds a twig and stabs him in the eye. The rebel howls, clutching his bloody eye. She squirms out from under him and runs away, shrieking.

EXT. MAI MAI HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Bienvenu whispers, feeling his way through the darkness.

BIENVENU
Sadiki? Where are you, Sadiki?

He spots the pinpoint glare of a flashlight, hears faint moaning. He grabs the flashlight and finds Sadiki slouched against a tree, his shirt soaked with blood.

BIENVENU (CONT'D)
Sadiki! No!

He frantically tries to stem the bleeding.

BIENVENU (CONT'D)
I will go get help.

He starts to leave, Sadiki grabs his arm.

SADIKI
No, please, do not go!

BIENVENU

Then I must get you out of here.

Bienvenu tries lifting him. Sadiki cries out in pain. He sets him back down.

BIENVENU (CONT'D)

I do not know what to do.

SADIKI

Just... stay here with me.

Bienvenu sits beside Sadiki, holds him close.

SADIKI (CONT'D)

I am afraid.

BIENVENU

I know.

SADIKI

I do not want to die.

He takes a shuddering breath.

BIENVENU

You cannot die. You are my only friend. Please, do not leave me.

Bullets ricochet off the trees above them.

SADIKI

I am... sorry.

Sadiki's eyes close.

BIENVENU

No, no, Sadiki!

Emmanuel shakes him, crying. He hears someone running through the trees. He stands and raises his AK. Solange stumbles out of the darkness. Bienvenu fires. She screams. The gouged-eyed rebel drops behind her.

Bienvenu and Solange stare at each other in shock. Colonel Ngandu and Adonis suddenly appear wielding machetes.

COLONEL NGANDU

I see you found the little whore.

He backhands Solange, knocking her down.

COLONEL NGANDU (CONT'D)

I warned you not to run from me.

He raises the machete.

BIENVENU

No!!!

Colonel Ngandu turns into the barrel of Bienvenu's gun.

COLONEL NGANDU

Perhaps you want her for yourself.

Bienvenu shoots him dead.

SOLANGE

Watch out!

Adonis lunges at Bienvenu with the machete. He narrowly dodges the blade. Adonis tackles him. They scuffle.

Adonis pins him down, raises the knife. His eyes go wide. He collapses on Bienvenu, who looks up to see Solange standing over them, holding Colonel Ngandu's bloody machete.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Bienvenu and Solange run through the forest.

EXT. JUNGLE - LATER

Bienvenu and Solange stop to catch their breath.

BIENVENU

We cannot stay here long. We must keep running.

SOLANGE

Where will we go?

BIENVENU

I heard of a camp in Masisi. You will be safe there.

SOLANGE

And what about you?

BIENVENU

I am a rebel now. My life is worthless.

SOLANGE

No, I want to stay with you. Please, do not leave me again!

BIENVENU

If the Mai-Mai learn what I have done, they will hunt me down and kill us both.

SOLANGE

I do not care. I am already dead.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Emmanuel plods along a dusty road, suffering from heat and dehydration. His legs finally give out. He falls face down.

EXT. JUNGLE - LATER

ISAAC, 40, leads TWO LEASHED GOATS up the road. He sees Emmanuel motionless in the dirt, rushes over and checks to see if he's breathing. The goats lick dried blood off Emmanuel's legs. Isaac picks him up and carries him off.

INT. ISAAC AND SIFA'S HUT - DAY

Emmanuel lies unconscious on the floor, covered by a thin blanket, the two goats curled beside him.

INT. ISAAC AND SIFA'S HUT - NIGHT

SIFA, 32, holds up a gourd for Emmanuel to drink.

SIFA

It is lucky Isaac found you. Where is your family?

EMMANUEL

I do not know. Rebels come, kill many people in my village.

SIFA

How did you end up here?

EMMANUEL

I was with another boy in the forest. A soldier found us and brought us to a camp. He gave us food and said we would be safe.

Emmanuel's starts to cry.

SIFA

Hush now, do not cry.

EMMANUEL

We are only boys.

SIFA

It is okay. You will be safe here.

EMMANUEL

I must find my family. My mother,
she will be very worried for me. I
am her only son.

EXT. ISAAC AND SIFA'S HUT - DAY

Sifa hands Emmanuel a sack of food and water.

ISAAC

You must stay hidden and keep off
the path. The camp is a long way,
but if your family is alive, they
will search for you there.

Emmanuel nods. Sifa hugs him tightly.

SIFA

Be safe, child, and may God
protect you.

With a last look, he sets off into the foreboding landscape.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

A BLUE DUIKER darts into the bushes as the women appear.
Neema carries the baby. Mia and Trudi support Allegra, who's
even weaker after giving birth.

MIA

Any idea how far we've gone?

TRUDI

Two, three clicks? Hard to tell.

Mia twists her hair into a knot.

MIA

Feels like a hundred in this heat.
(to Allegra)
Is the pain any better?

ALLEGRA

A little.

Neema pulls a scrap of khaki material from a branch.

NEEMA

It is from a uniform.

TRUDI

Ya know what kind?

NEEMA

The killing kind.

The baby begins to cry. Neema tries soothing her.

MAMA EVANGELINE
What is wrong with her?

NEEMA
I do not know.

ALLEGRA
Maybe she is hungry.

They stop so she can feed her. The women's anxiety grows as the infant's wails intensify.

MAMA EVANGELINE
You must quiet her!

ALLEGRA
I am trying!

MIA
Here, let me take her.

Allegra hands Mia the baby. She presses her forehead to the baby's and softly coos. The baby slowly calms.

TRUDI
What bloody voodoo crap is that?

Mia laughs and lays the baby against her shoulder.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Emmanuel heeds Isaac's advice and stays hidden from the path. As he drains the last of his water, he hears VOICES nearby. He ducks behind a tree.

Bashi, Francois and Jobert walk past just feet away. Jobert has a dead chicken slung over his shoulder.

JOBERT
I fight for two years. Then I
escape and return to my village.

FRANCOIS
Why are you here if you escaped?

JOBERT
My family was afraid of me. They
say now I am a killer and maybe I
would kill them, too. Who knows?
Maybe I would.

BASHI
I would have run far away where no
one could ever find me.

JOBERT

At least I do not starve so much
now. We should eat the chicken
before we reach camp.

INT. ABANDONED CAMP - DAY

Neema and Trudi part a curtain of leaves, revealing an
abandoned camp. The ground is littered with debris.

TRUDI

Would ya look at this place!

Mia picks up a shoe, a woven basket.

MIA

What is it?

Trudi examines a dented cooking pot.

TRUDI

A corker of a gold mine.

Neema unearths a machete blade in the dirt.

NEEMA

I think it is a rebel camp.

MIA

Will they come back?

Mama Evangeline shakes out a dirty blanket.

MAMA EVANGELINE

The fires are cold. They have
probably moved on.

MIA

Then we should stay and give
Allegra time to recover.

INT. ABANDONED CAMP - DAY

Allegra and the baby sleep soundly on the blanket.

EXT. BERRY GROVE - DAY

Neema and Mia gather berries in a grove. Mia passes a handful
to Neema, who tucks them into the folds of her skirt. She
glances over at Mia. Her demeanor softens slightly.

NEEMA

It was not always this way. We had
a normal life once. Our village
(MORE)

NEEMA (CONT'D)
 was a family. We helped each other
 with the harvest, and celebrated
 the seasons with singing, dancing
 and feasting. Of course, there
 were many struggles, but we were
 happy. It was a normal life.

Mia nods sympathetically. They continue picking berries. Mia
 notices dark clouds moving in.

MIA
 I think it might rain.

NEEMA
 It has not rained in many months.
 I fear now when the rains come,
 the rivers will run red with the
 blood of my people.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The harsh CAW of a crow startles Emmanuel. He looks up at the
 ominous sky and hurries on.

INT. ABANDONED CAMP - DAY

A RUMBLE OF THUNDER echoes in the distance. The women shelter
 under a tree's billowing dome.

MAMA EVANGELINE
 Some believe when it rains, the
 spirits of the dead come down to
 earth to bring good luck.

TRUDI
 We'd be lucky enough to catch a
 break from this heat, eh?

Mia's gaze drifts over to Allegra with her newborn.

MIA
 Her little world is perfect,
 despite all this chaos around her.

Allegra smiles.

ALLEGRA
 There is a story my grandmother
 used to tell of a great tree in
 the jungle that soared so high,
 its branches touched the heavens
 and its leaves shone in the sun's
 rays. After a long drought, a
 gentle rain began to fall. The
 tree was overjoyed. It drank in
 (MORE)

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
 the rain and let it soak the dry
 earth around it. But soon the
 storm grew more powerful. The tree
 began to sway and quiver. The
 animals could see the tree was in
 danger, and just as it was about
 to break, they came out of hiding
 and held onto its trunk, keeping
 it safe until the storm passed.
 (she regards each woman)
 Each of you held me up through the
 storm so I could meet my daughter.

They're all touched. The baby gurgles and they laugh.

MIA
 Have you given her a name?

ALLEGRA
 Her name is Mia. Mia Beckham.

Mia is stunned.

MIA
 Oh, no, you shouldn't...

ALLEGRA
 You delivered her into this world.
 She should have your name.

MIA
 I don't know what to say. I'm
 honored, truly. And why Beckham?

ALLEGRA
 Emmanuel likes soccer very much.

Mia is hit by a wave of grief. Tears roll down her cheeks.

MIA
 My son... he liked soccer, too.

Trudi turns to her, confused.

TRUDI
 But ya said...

MIA
 He was six. He was killed a few
 months ago.

TRUDI
 Oh, Mia.

MAMA EVANGELINE
 We are the same in our sorrow. We
 all miss our children. But your
 (MORE)

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)
 son is still here. He did not
 leave you. It is not possible. A
 woman's children are like the
 trunk of an elephant. They are
 always together. They can never be
 separated, not even in death.

Mia wipes her eyes.

MIA
 Every day you think the pain will
 ease just a little, but you wake
 up and nothing's changed. It just
 starts all over again. For six
 years, I was a mother, then
 suddenly, I wasn't.

NEEMA
 We are always mothers, whether our
 children are with us in this world
 or waiting for us in the next.

MIA
 But what are we? I mean, when you
 lose a husband, you're a widow. A
 parent, you're an orphan. But what
 are you when you lose a child? It
 doesn't even have a name.

MAMA EVANGELINE
 Because there is no word big
 enough to hold such pain.

A solemn silence falls, punctuated by CRACKS of THUNDER. A
 LIGHTNING FLASH briefly illuminates Neema's face.

NEEMA
 One of us must survive so our
 children will not be forgotten. It
 does not matter who.

As these words hang over them, the earth is shaken by a loud
 THUNDERBOLT. A PATTERNING on the leaves above lifts their gaze
 skyward in anticipation. Suddenly, rain comes pouring down.

They leap up with arms outstretched, as cold water cascades
 over their bodies like a baptism. Allegra holds baby Mia up
 to the sky. They laugh, splashing in the rain, and rejoicing
 in this moment of grace.

Their VOICES carry across the forest to --

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Bienvenu and Solange huddled together under giant banana
 leaves, shielded from the pelting storm --

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Emmanuel watching the rain from the shelter of a hollow tree.

EXT. STREAM - DAY

A peacefulness has settled over the forest in the storm's wake. Leaves glisten with tiny droplets. The sun's rays create a kaleidoscope of colors. Everything feels alive.

Bienvenu and Solange drink from a small stream, their sad, weary faces, a stark contrast to the surrounding beauty.

EXT. STREAM / ROCKY BLUFF - DAY

Bienvenu and Solange wade through mud. They follow the stream to a rocky bluff overlooking a river.

INT. ABANDONED CAMP - DAY

Mud has overtaken the camp. Trudi sits on a log, poking at it with a stick. Mia wrings out her T-shirt.

MIA

Did you get any sleep?

TRUDI

Afraid I'd drown if I did.

MIA

Yeah, me too.

She hangs the T-shirt on a branch, pulls another from her rucksack, slips it over her head, then sits beside Trudi.

TRUDI

Is that why ya came here? Because of ya son?

MIA

I needed to get as far away from my life as I could. Everyone moved on so quickly after Cole's death, but I'm still living it every minute of every day. Here, I'm just a childless mother like all the other childless mothers. It's like I found my people. As awful as it is -- and it is so fucking awful -- my life almost makes sense here.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Water eddies around jagged rocks. Bienvenu sits on the bank, staring the river. He doesn't notice Solange hovering close to the edge. Her eyes are glazed over, and her voice is eerie as she sings the same melody from earlier.

SOLANGE
(Swahili, subtitled)
Oh boat, come back to me.
Since you carried my child away,
I have not seen that child.
Oh boat, come back to me.

Bienvenu looks over just as Solange leans forward, allowing gravity to pull her down. He reaches out --

BIENVENU
Solange!!!

-- Watching helplessly as she's swept downstream and disappears into the churning tide.

EXT. GRASS HUT - DAY

Emmanuel hides behind a tree, watches a WOMAN gather three eggs from a hen's nest and place them in a basket. She sets the basket down and goes inside her hut.

Emmanuel grabs the eggs, reconsiders, and puts one back, then races off. The woman returns seconds later, sees the lone egg, looks around, shrugs, and takes the basket inside.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Solange has washed up on a grassy bank. Her eyes flutter open. She moans faintly and slips back into unconsciousness.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Bienvenu wanders the forest, bereft after losing Sadiki and Solange. He finds a rebel with his face blown off, stares impassively, then takes the rebel's gun.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

A stick descends into a swarming anthill, reemerges covered in ants. Bienvenu smashes and eats them. Continues foraging.

As he plucks berries from a bush, a CATERPILLAR crawls onto his hand. Its iridescent hues shimmer in the sunlight. He watches it curiously, then sets it gently back on a leaf.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Bienvenu sleeps against a tree. His eyes snap open, the barrel of an AK-47 pressed to his forehead. A flashlight shines in his eyes. THREE SHADOWED FIGURES loom over him.

FIGURE #1

Who you with, soldier? We kill you
right now! Who you with?

If they're FDLR, he's dead. If they're Mai-Mai and know what he's done, he's just as dead. FIGURE #2 waves a machete.

FIGURE #2

You want to die? You die now!

Bienvenu hears rustling, discerns the faint outline of a skirt in the murky light. He takes a calculated risk.

BIENVENU

I am... Mai-Mai.

FIGURE #2

Mai-Mai? What name you called?

BIENVENU

Bienvenu.

Bashi lowers the machete, laughs uproariously.

BASHI

Bienvenu? Why you not say so? It
is me, Bashi. I am with Francois
and Jobert. We think you FDLR. We
ready to spill your fucking guts.

FRANCOIS

Where is Sadiki?

BIENVENU

Sadiki is dead.

FRANCOIS

Dead?

Maybe they don't know. Bienvenu runs with it.

BIENVENU

FDLR shot him. Colonel Ngandu and
Adonis too. They're all dead. I
barely escaped with my own life.

JOBERT

It is sad day for the Mai-Mai. But
it is good we have found you. We

(MORE)

JOBERT (CONT'D)
will find the others and avenge
their deaths.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

In dawn's hazy light, Bienvenu, Bashi, Francois and Jobert search the forest for surviving Mai-Mai. Francois stumbles on the body of an FDLR rebel and empties his clip into it.

FRANCOIS
I am out of bullets.

Jobert shakes his head, irritated.

JOBERT
Why waste bullets on a dead guy?

INT. ABANDONED CAMP - DAY

The newborn's plaintive cry stirs the women from sleep. Allegra tries to nurse her, but the baby continues to fuss.

ALLEGRA
She will not eat.

NEEMA
Maybe something else bothers her.

EXT. JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

Jobert hears faint CRYING. Signals the others to follow.

INT. ABANDONED CAMP - DAY

Neema sharpens the machete blade against a rock. Allegra grows flustered trying to calm the squalling infant.

ALLEGRA
I cannot quiet her.

MAMA EVANGELINE
Here, I will take her.

Allegra gratefully passes the baby to Mama Evangeline.

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)
It is okay. Hush now, baby, hush.

But the baby will not be quieted. Neema gets up to help.

NEEMA
Maybe she needs to...

She stiffens. They all turn to see Jobert, Bashì, Francois and Bienvenu, rifles and machetes glinting in the sun.

Mama Evangeline clasps the baby to her chest. Neema hides the blade in the folds of her skirt. No one says a word. No one makes a move. The baby's cries amplified by the silence.

Mama Evangeline's eyes move from Jobert to Bashì to Francois, then fall on Bienvenu. In their fear, the others don't seem to recognize him. He meets her gaze, his face inscrutable.

Jobert steps menacingly towards Mia, his breath hot on her neck. She twists her head away. Over Mia's shoulder, he sees Mama Evangeline slip the infant behind her to Allegra.

Jobert shoves Mia aside, goes for the baby. Mama Evangeline blocks him. He presses the gun to her chest. Neema, standing a few feet away, mutters to herself.

NEEMA (CONT'D)

Someone must survive. It does not matter who.

Neema lunges at Jobert, jams the broken machete blade deep into his side. He drops like a bag of bricks.

GUNSHOTS ring out. Neema jerks violently. The blade slips from her hand. She falls lifelessly to the ground.

MAMA EVANGELINE

Nooooooooo!!!

Mama Evangeline rushes over, holds her, weeping.

Bashì keeps firing. Mia tackles him like a linebacker, grips his throat and tries to strangle him.

Jobert reaches for his gun. It's just beyond his grasp.

Francois charges Mia. Trudi bashes him in the head with the cooking pot. He falls, drops the machete. They both dive for it, scuffling in the mud. He slashes Trudi's leg.

The baby lays howling on the ground. Allegra drags herself on hands and knees towards Neema's blade.

Trudi is pinned under Francois. She reaches for the machete. Her fingers brush the tip. She arches back to grasp it.

Jobert's fingers graze the edge of his gun.

Trudi gets hold of the blade, plunges it into Francois' back. Blood bubbles from his lips. She rolls out from under him.

Bashì throws Mia to the ground, puts the gun to her head. SHOTS RING OUT. Bashì's eyes widen. He crumbles in a heap.

Jobert looks around in confusion. Sees Bienvenu's AK trained on him. They lock eyes. Bienvenu fires, but the rifle jams.

With her last ounce of strength, Allegra stabs Jobert in the neck as he pulls the trigger.

Jobert falls over dead. Bienvenu sinks to the ground.

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)
Bienvenu!!

Mama Evangeline rushes over. He stares at her in shock. She lifts his shirt. There's a gaping hole in his stomach.

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)
Do not worry! It is okay. Mia! I
need your help! Hurry!

Mia rises, slightly dazed. She goes to Bienvenu, applies pressure to the wound. Blood gushes between her fingers.

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)
He is from our village. Please,
you must save him.

MIA
I need something to stop the
bleeding.

She sees her T-shirt hanging on the branch.

MIA (CONT'D)
Go get my shirt!

Mama Evangeline runs off. Mia holds Bienvenu's hand.

MIA (CONT'D)
I want you to take slow, deep
breaths, okay? Nice and slow.

She views him more closely. He seems so young, so vulnerable, hardly the threat from moments ago.

MIA (CONT'D)
My God, you're just a child.

Mama Evangeline returns with the shirt. Mia tries to staunch the flow, but the shirt is quickly saturated. She looks at Mama Evangeline, sadly shakes her head. Mama Evangeline is shattered. Bienvenu shivers.

BIENVENU
I am cold... so cold.

Mama Evangeline moves close to him.

MAMA EVANGELINE

It is okay. I will keep you warm.
Here, rest your head against me.

She pulls him into her arms.

MAMA EVANGELINE (CONT'D)

You were very brave, Bienvenu.
Your parents would be so proud.

He starts to cry.

BIENVENU

I have done... many terrible
things.

MAMA EVANGELINE

Hush, now. You did only what you
must to survive.

BIENVENU

I killed... many people.

MAMA EVANGELINE

You saved us.

MIA

That's right. We owe you our
lives. You're a hero.

Bienvenu meets Mia's eyes, finding comfort in her words. Then he coughs up blood, and slumps against Mama Evangeline.

MAMA EVANGELINE

Bienvenu! Bienvenu! Nooooooooo!!!

Mama Evangeline shakes him. Mia touches her shoulder.

MIA

He's gone. I'm so sorry.

At first, Mama Evangeline doesn't seem to understand, then she breaks down. Mia holds her as she sobs.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

A MONKEY runs along a branch, chattering angrily at something below. A ROCK just misses its head.

Emmanuel stands at the base of the tree, hauls another rock. The monkey screeches and leaps away. Emmanuel's shoulders sag. He waits a moment, then moves on.

His bare feet sink into the sodden earth, his stomach cramps from hunger. He stops to eat some grass.

EXT. SECLUDED HUT - DAY

The aroma from a cookstove lures Emmanuel to a secluded hut. He waits for an OLD MAN to go inside, then steals towards the fire. He's within arm's reach when a YOUNG BOY steps out. They both freeze. The boy yells to someone inside. A YOUNGER MAN appears, and chases Emmanuel with a wooden club.

Trees whiz past as Emmanuel tries to outrun the man, who quickly gains on him. Just as he's about to grab Emmanuel, he slips in the mud, cursing as Emmanuel escapes.

Emmanuel keeps running. He leaps across a muddy road, climbs a hill, hides in the tall grass. He waits a few moments, then lifts his head. No sign of the angry man. He lays back down.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The heat saps the women's strength and spirits as they slog through ankle-deep mud. Trudi's leg is bandaged, and she leans heavily on a stick. Allegra eyes are misty.

ALLEGRA

Neema was my oldest friend. I have known her my whole life.

MAMA EVANGELINE

She needed to be with her children, but she would want us to keep going. We must honor her sacrifice by not giving up.

EXT. STREAM - DAY

Mama Evangeline and Allegra wash mud and rebels' blood from their bodies in the stream.

Mia unwraps Trudi's leg. Her eyes flicker with alarm. It's swollen, and yellow pus seeps from the wound.

TRUDI

That's not looking too good, mate.

MIA

Humidity's prime breeding grounds for infection, and the iodine doesn't seem to be helping.

TRUDI

Got anything else we can do?

Mia looks at her, grimly.

MIA
Find a way out of here fast.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Mama Evangeline clears away thick vines on the path with Francois' machete. Trudi struggles to keep up. She stumbles, clenches her teeth, and catches Mia's worried look.

TRUDI
Don't bother 'bout me, eh? Just
bloody find a way outta here.

They continue walking. Neema stops suddenly, listens.

NEEMA
Do you hear that?

There's a faint sound of rushing water.

MIA
It sounds like a river, but which
way is it coming from?

They try to pinpoint the source. The trees distort the sound.

NEEMA
I cannot tell.

Mama Evangeline notices freshly disturbed, broken branches.

MAMA EVANGELINE
I think we should go this way.

EXT. ROCKY BLUFF - DAY

The women stand atop a rocky bluff, peering down at the river. They carefully navigate the jagged stones as they make their way to the bottom.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

A VULTURE circles overhead, dives towards the river, then retreats back to the sky. Mia fills a canteen and brings it to Trudi, who is resting her leg.

MIA
How you holding up?

TRUDI
Not dead yet, but maybe soon.

MIA
Not funny.

TRUDI

I'll work on my material. So,
what's the plan? Is there a plan?

MIA

I think we should keep heading
downstream. We're bound to run
into a village, or people, or
something.

TRUDI

Or something. That's my worry.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

The women proceed down the river bank. Mia points as the
vulture zeroes in on a DARK OBJECT up ahead.

MIA

What's he after over there?

TRUDI

Probably some garbage washed up.

As they get closer, it looks like driftwood or maybe a
carcass -- AND THEN IT MOVES. Mia gasps, takes off running.

MIA

Oh my God!

Solange covers her head and swats at the vulture. Mia runs
toward her, waving her arms.

MIA (CONT'D)

Shoo! Go on! Get out of here!

Mia chases off the vulture. Solange tries to stand. She's
bruised and disoriented. Mia holds out her hand.

MIA (CONT'D)

Here, let me help you.

Solange shrinks back.

MIA (CONT'D)

It's okay. I won't hurt you.

She staggers to her feet, takes off running. Mia chases her.

MIA (CONT'D)

No, wait! Come back!

Solange stumbles. Mia picks her up, holds her tight as tries
to twist free.

SOLANGE
Let me go! Let me go!

MIA
It's okay. You're okay.

SOLANGE
I want to die! Just let me die!

Solange fights until she has no fight left. She collapses against Mia, sobbing.

EXT. HILL / MUDDY ROAD - DAY

Emmanuel hears people coming down the road. He peers over the grass, sees WOMEN with bundles on their backs, BABIES in their arms, CHILDREN at their sides.

He scrambles down the hill. The women ignore him as they pass. He approaches BIJOU, 32. She carries a sickly INFANT. TWO TIRED TODDLERS cling to her skirt.

EMMANUEL
I am looking for my family.

She shoots him a cursory glance, keeps walking.

BIJOU
I do not know your family.

EMMANUEL
But you are going to the camp?

She stops, turns to him.

BIJOU
What do you want?

EMMANUEL
I want to come with you.

Her gaze hardens.

BIJOU
How do I know you will not slit
our throats while we sleep?

EMMANUEL
I am just a boy.

BIJOU
Our children are dying. There are
already too many mouths to feed.

As she walks away, Emmanuel makes a last desperate plea.

EMMANUEL
Please, I am all alone.

Bijou looks to another WOMAN, who responds with a shrug.

BIJOU
Fine, you can come with us, but
you must find your own food.

EXT. MUDDY ROAD - DAY

Emmanuel walks a few paces behind Bijou and her children.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Mia cleans Solange's scrapes and cuts.

MIA
You got pretty banged up out
there, but you'll be okay.

Solange stares out at the river.

MIA (CONT'D)
I'm sure it was very frightening,
everything you've been through,
but you're safe now. You can stay
with us if you'd like.

TRUDI
Can you tell us ya name?

She answers woodenly, her gaze fixed on the water.

SOLANGE
My name is Solange.

Mia and Trudi share a look.

MIA
That's a very pretty name.

TRUDI
Where are ya from, Solange?

SOLANGE
It does not matter.

MIA
Why do you say that?

SOLANGE
Because I can never return. I have
brought terrible shame to my
(MORE)

SOLANGE (CONT'D)
family. I have no one now. That is
why it is better to be dead.

Mia crouches so they're face level.

MIA
You know what? I have no one
either. I'm all alone in this
world, just like you.

Solange meets her eyes, not quite believing.

MIA (CONT'D)
But, now that we've found each
other, maybe we can stick together
so neither of us is all alone.
Would that be okay with you?

With tears in her eyes and a rueful nod, she leans against
Mia, grateful the stranger's kindness.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Solange and Allegra cool their feet in the river. Mia and
Trudi observe from a distance.

TRUDI
Ya reckon it's her?

MIA
I don't know. I mean, it could be.
She looks about the same age. How
common is the name Solange?

TRUDI
No clue.

Mia sighs.

MIA
What does it matter really? If it
is, her family's dead. Pascal's
probably dead. And if it isn't,
she still has no home to go to.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Emmanuel chooses a spot to sleep, apart from the women and
children. He watches Bijou fret over her frail infant.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Emmanuel is woken at dawn by an anguished wail. Bijou weeps
over her baby.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

The women pass a bloated body in the river, swarming with flies. They cover their noses and turn away, the gruesome sight a reminder of the ever-present danger.

They continue along the river bank. Solange walks beside Allegra, holding the sleeping infant. Allegra suddenly clutches her chest and cries out. Mia and Mama Evangeline catch her as she staggers. Her eyes are panicked.

MAMA EVANGELINE
What is happening to her?

MIA
I don't know. She may have thrown
a clot. Quick, set her down.

As they lower her, Allegra resists.

ALLEGRA
No, we must... keep going.

MAMA EVANGELINE
You must be still.

ALLEGRA
I have to... find... Emmanuel.

Mia checks her pulse. Feels her forehead.

MIA
She's burning up. Could be sepsis.

Mama Evangeline takes off her headwrap, wets it in the river, sets it on Allegra's forehead to cool her down. They watch helplessly as she slips in and out of consciousness.

ALLEGRA
Emmanuel... Emmanu...

TRUDI
I reckoned she was on the mend.

MIA
She suffered a lot of trauma and
lost a lot of blood. It's a
miracle she made it this far.

Allegra's eyes flutter open. She grasps Mia's hand.

ALLEGRA
Emmanuel... You must find him.

MIA
We'll keep searching.

ALLEGRA
(her grip tightens)
No... promise me!

Mia hesitates under the weight of such a promise.

MIA
We'll find him... I promise.

Allegra's breathing becomes erratic.

ALLEGRA
Mia...

MIA
Yes?

ALLEGRA
Baby...

MIA
You want the baby?

Solange goes to hand her the baby. Allegra shakes her head.

ALLEGRA
No, no...

Solange turns to Mia, confused.

MIA
I don't know what you want.

ALLEGRA
Yours.

MIA
Mine? I don't understand.

ALLEGRA
Baby... I give... to you.

The realization hits Mia --

MIA
Oh, no, you can't...

ALLEGRA
I cannot go... until I know... she
is safe.

Mia's heart breaks for her.

MIA
Of course. Of course, I'll keep
her safe. We all will. There's
nothing for you to worry about.

ALLEGRA

I wish... once more... to see.

Mia nods to Solange, who places the baby alongside Allegra. She gazes at her child, taking in every last detail. The women weep as she says goodbye.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

I am sorry... I must leave you now. It is how... it must be.

Her eyes close and, with a deep sigh, she's gone.

INT. JUNGLE - DAY

Bijou wanders through the forest in a daze. Her two surviving children close behind. Emmanuel follows at a distance.

EXT. JUNGLE - LATER

Emmanuel digs in the soft earth, pulls up a wild yam. He offers it to Bijou, slumped against a tree, bereft from her loss. She accepts it with a tiny nod of gratitude.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Emmanuel sleeps beside Bijou and her two children.

EXT. RIVER BANK / JUNGLE - DAY

Wild vegetation takes over the river bank, forcing the women back into the jungle. Trudi is pale, struggling to breathe, barely able to keep up.

MIA

Hey, you okay?

TRUDI

Been better, to be honest.

MIA

Just hang in there. We'll be out of this soon.

TRUDI

Gonna hold you to that.

EXT. MUDDY ROAD - DAY

Emmanuel holds Bijou's children's hands. A steady stream of refugees merges with others on the road.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Flies swarm the tourniquet as Mia unwraps Trudi's leg. Her eyes flicker with alarm. The flesh is blue, red lines spread from the wound. Trudi puts on a brave face.

TRUDI
'Tis but a scratch.

MIA
Bit more than a scratch.

Trudi looks at her, somberly.

TRUDI
Bit more than we bargained for.
All this, I mean.

MIA
Hey, just think of the stories
we'll tell when we're out of here.

TRUDI
Bloody oath, we will.

But Mia's dread is evident as she rewraps the leg.

EXT. MUDDY ROAD - DAY

The crowd moves like a slow tide under the relentless midday sun. Emmanuel tries to coax the children along. Bijou falters, woozy from the heat. He takes her arm to steady her. She looks at him as if truly seeing him for the first time.

BIJOU
Thank you.

A WOMEN collapses and the crowd parts around her like river to rock, leaving her facedown in the mud.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Trudi is feverish, her condition rapidly deteriorating. Mia holds a canteen to her parched lips.

MIA
Drink. You need to stay hydrated.

She chokes on the water. Mia swats hopelessly at flies, her face showing the strain of their arduous journey.

TRUDI
Ya still have a shot without me.

MIA

What? What are you talking about?

Trudi looks at the baby, fussing in Solange's arms.

TRUDI

Ya need to think of yourself and the others.

MIA

I'm thinking about all of us.

TRUDI

Ya won't last out here much longer. I'm slowing ya down. C'mon, ya know as well as I do, I've got a Buckley's chance of makin' it to the camp. Leave me behind and save yourselves.

MIA

Just shut up, alright? No one's leaving anyone behind.

EXT. MUDDY ROAD - DAY

Bijou's children whimper from hunger and fatigue. Bijou can't bear to see them suffer and breaks away from the group.

EMMANUEL

Where are you going?

Emmanuel follows, dragging the children with him. Bijou walks to the edge of the road and sits down in the mud.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

We must keep walking.

BIJOU

I am too tired to go on.

EMMANUEL

If you sit, you will never get up.

BIJOU

I no longer care.

CHILDREN

Mama, get up! Get up!

The children tug at her skirt, but sorrow weighs her down.

EMMANUEL

Please, we need you.

From somewhere within the crowd, a woman begins to SING. One-by-one, other VOICES join in, forming a chorus that fills the air and lifts their spirits, rallying them on.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

It is a sign. We must keep going.

Bijou's eyes meet Emmanuel's. After a moment, she reaches out her hand, allowing him to help her up.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Mia and Mama Evangeline bear Trudi's full weight as they maneuver through the forest.

TRUDI

If I die... just don't leave me here. I don't want to be some wild animal's midnight snack.

MIA

No one's dying. Not here. Not now.

The baby cries. Solange offers her a finger to suck on.

SOLANGE

She is very hungry.

Mia looks at the pitiful infant, feeling helpless knowing time is running out for all of them.

Mama Evangeline's head whips around as an weathered OLD MAN appears, clutching a large knife, bush meat slung over his shoulder. They freeze, assessing the threat. The man points, mutters something unintelligible.

MIA

(to Mama Evangeline)

What's he saying?

MAMA EVANGELINE

I do not know his language.

MIA

My friend is sick. She needs help.

(off his confusion)

Elle est très malade.

Mama Evangeline tries communicating in Swahili, SUBTITLED.

MAMA EVANGELINE

The white woman is very sick.

The man nods, waves for them to follow.

MIA
Should we follow him?

MAMA EVANGELINE
If he meant to hurt us, I think we
would be already hurt.

The man leads them through the jungle until the trees begin to thin, and they're back on the river bank.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Gulls swoop down, snatching fish from the river. Mia and Mama Evangeline buckle under Trudi's weight.

MIA
Sorry, I gotta stop a minute.

Trudi is barely conscious as they lay her on the ground. While they catch their breath, the old man whistles to TWO BOATMEN, hauling a wooden pirogue ashore.

The men settle the vessel, walk over, and briefly converse. Nodding to the women, they gently lift Trudi and carry her to the pirogue. Mia climbs in beside her. The men begin rowing.

The old man takes Mama Evangeline, Solange and the baby in another boat, forming a small convoy across the river.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

OARS slice through clear water as the twin pirogues glide gracefully along the current.

INT. PIROGUE - DAY

Trudi slumps against Mia, drenched in sweat. A soft breeze brushes their faces. Trudi stirs, her senses gradually sharpening. She straightens up, gazing at the river in awe.

TRUDI
Aren't they magnificent?

MIA
What is, Trudi?

TRUDI
My roses.

Mia's breath catches. Trudi falls back against her with a blissful smile. Mia holds her tightly, staring stoically ahead as Trudi slips away.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

LORRIES transport fleeing villagers. NGO and AID TRUCKS rush by in a whirl of noise and chaos.

Mia walks behind the two boatmen carrying Trudi's body. Mama Evangeline and Solange wait solemnly beside a UN truck.

The women cling to each other as Trudi is placed in the back, and the truck pulls away, their tears flowing in a torrent of grief for their loss and relief at their rescue.

MAMA EVANGELINE

You did everything you could.

MIA

It wasn't enough.

EXT. IDP CAMP - DAY

Thousands of WHITE TENTS stretch against a backdrop of royal green escarpment.

Conditions in the camp are dismal. Emmanuel, Bijou, and her two children wait in line, hundreds deep, for water.

INT. IDP CAMP - CLINIC - DAY

Mia lies on a cot, hooked to an IV, looking utterly drained. Regina opens the curtain.

REGINA

Heard you practically annihilated
an entire militia to get here.

Mia smiles.

MIA

I wouldn't go that far, but I'll
raise you a few dead rebels.

Regina moves closer, her eyes well.

REGINA

Thank God you're okay. I'm sorry
for dragging you into all this.

MIA

There's nothing to be sorry about.

REGINA

If anything happened to you, I'd
never forgive myself.

MIA
But it didn't. I'm okay, really.

REGINA
We've arranged for Trudi's body to
be flown back to Perth.

MIA
That's good, she'd want that. How
are the others?

REGINA
Apart from dehydration and the
expected trauma, they seem okay.

Mia nods, relieved. Regina takes Mia's hand.

REGINA (CONT'D)
You had me worried sick. I think I
sprouted fifty new gray hairs.

MIA
I can relate.

INT. IDP CAMP - CLINIC - DAY

Mia's color is back. She moves with renewed vigor as she
makes rounds. She hands an ELDERLY WOMAN a bottle of pills.

MIA
(in French, subtitled)
*This will help the infection. You
need to take one pill twice a day.*

The woman nods, gratefully.

INT. IDP CAMP - REGISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Mia waits at a registration desk while an AID WORKER searches
a file cabinet.

AID WORKER
How old did you say he was?

MIA
He's seven, maybe eight years old.

She hands Mia a giant ledger.

AID WORKER
These are all the admissions from
the past month. Good luck.

EXT. IDP CAMP - DAY

Emmanuel wanders alone through the crowded camp. He passes an open sewage pit and holds his nose.

A GROUP OF CHILDREN play soccer. The ball rolls to Emmanuel. A BOY runs over and he hands it to him.

BOY
Do you want to play?

Emmanuel shakes his head and walks off.

INT. IDP CAMP - BIJOU'S TENT - NIGHT

Bijou and her children sleep peacefully. Emmanuel lies awake, quietly weeping, longing for his family.

INT. IDP CAMP - OFFICE - DAY

Mia drops the giant ledger on Regina's desk with a thud.

REGINA
Take it things aren't going well?

MIA
Needle in a haystack.

REGINA
Don't lose hope. He's here somewhere. How's the baby?

MIA
She can't keep any formula down. I tried finding a wet nurse, but the mothers here are too malnourished to feed their own babies.

REGINA
I'll ask around. I'm sure there's someone who can help.

MIA
Thanks.

Mia turns to leave.

REGINA
Hey, and don't worry about Emmanuel. You'll find him.

MIA
What makes you so sure?

REGINA
You promised you would.

INT. IDP CAMP - MAMA EVANGELINE'S TENT - NIGHT

A lantern casts flickering shadows on the tent wall. Mia ducks inside with a blanket. She settles down on a mat between Mama Evangeline and Solange.

MAMA EVANGELINE
Why you not sleep in the big nurse tent? It is more comfortable.

She adjusts the blanket tenderly around the sleeping baby.

MIA
Because I'd rather be here with all of you.

Mama Evangeline's smiles at her.

MAMA EVANGELINE
We are family now. Blood may not bind us, but our hearts do.

EXT. IDP CAMP - GARBAGE HEAP / CLINIC - DAY

Emmanuel and a group of children rummage through a garbage heap. He cuts himself on a metal shard. NADIA, 12, notices.

NADIA
Your hand is bleeding.

She finds a dirty cloth and wraps it.

NADIA (CONT'D)
I will take you to the clinic.

She takes his other hand and guides him through the camp. They join a long line of people waiting outside the clinic.

INT. IDP CAMP - CLINIC - DAY

Inside, the clinic is bustling. Mia tirelessly tends to patients, moving swiftly from one to the next, checking charts, administering medications.

EXT. IDP CAMP - CLINIC - DAY

An ATTENDANT calls out to the next person in line.

ATTENDANT
 (in French, subtitled)
 Suivant, s'il vous plaît.

Emmanuel and Nadia enter the tent.

INT. IDP CAMP - CLINIC - DAY

Mia finishes splinting a PATIENT'S foot, hands him crutches.

MIA
 (in French, subtitled)
*It should feel better in a few
 days. Try not to walk or put
 pressure on it if you can.*

PATIENT
 Merci.

The patient limps off. Mia turns around to mark his chart.
 The attendant enters with Emmanuel and Nadia.

ATTENDANT
 This one may need a stitch or two.
 (to Emmanuel)
 Comment tu t'appelles?

EMMANUEL
 Emmanuel.

Mia stops writing, pen poised mid-air. She turns around.
 Emmanuel's jaw drops when he sees her.

MIA
 Emmanuel...

EMMANUEL
 You nurse, not MONUC.

MIA
 Yes. No, not MONUC.

She rushes over and embraces him tightly.

MIA (CONT'D)
 I can't believe it's you. We
 searched everywhere, all through
 the forest. I promised your mother
 I wouldn't stop until I found you.

Emmanuel's face lights up.

EMMANUEL
 My mother? She is here? Please,
 you will take me to her?

Mia struggles to find the right words.

MIA
Your mother was very brave. She
loved you very much, and she tried
so very hard to stay here for you.

Tears stream down Emmanuel's face.

EMMANUEL
My father?

MIA
I'm so sorry, Emmanuel.

Emmanuel's whole body deflates. He stares down at the floor.

EMMANUEL
All my family is gone.

His pain is more than she can bear. Then, she remembers.

MIA
No, no, that isn't true!

EXT. MAMA EVANGELINE'S TENT - DAY

Mama Evangeline and Solange sit outside the tent. The baby
cries as Solange tries to bottle feed her.

MAMA EVANGELINE
Is she drinking it?

SOLANGE
A bit, but her stomach is swollen.
Maybe it is not so good for her.

Mia appears, leading Emmanuel by the hand. Mama Evangeline
sees him and lets out a squeal. She sweeps him into her arms
and showers him with kisses.

MAMA EVANGELINE
Oh, my precious little bird.

Mia takes the baby from Solange.

MIA
And this is your baby sister.

Emmanuel's eyes widen.

EMMANUEL
My sister?

MIA
Would you like to hold her?

He nods. Mia places the mewling infant in his arms. She gazes up at Emmanuel and instantly quiets.

EMMANUEL
She knows me! What is she called?

MIA
Her name is Beckham.

EMMANUEL
Hello, Beckham. I am your big brother, Emmanuel. We are a family and I will take care of you.

EXT. IDP CAMP - DAY

Mia holds the baby as Emmanuel leads her through the camp.

MIA
But, I still don't understand.
Where are you taking me?

EMMANUEL
I know someone who can help.

EXT. BIJOU'S TENT - DAY

Bijou fans a small fire near her tent. She looks up curiously as Mia and Emmanuel approach. He takes the baby from Mia.

EMMANUEL
This is my baby sister.

BIJOU
Your sister?

EMMANUEL
Her name is Beckham.

BIJOU
(indicating Mia)
And who is this?

EMMANUEL
My mother sent her to find me.

MIA
I'm Mia. I'm a nurse here.

BIJOU
Your mother? She is at the camp?

EMMANUEL
No... she is dead.

BIJOU

I am very sorry, Emmanuel.

EMMANUEL

My baby sister is hungry and she needs milk.

Bijou regards the newborn, the loss of her own child still raw. She nods to Emmanuel. He hands her Beckham and she puts the baby to her breast.

EXT. MAMA EVANGELINE'S TENT - DAY

Mia returns from working at the clinic, surprised to find Bijou, Mama Evangeline and Solange sitting together outside the tent. Emmanuel and Bijou's children play nearby.

MAMA EVANGELINE

She is sad like us. We ask her to sit so we could share her sadness.

Mia is touched by their empathy. She sits beside Bijou, finding comfort in their shared sorrow.

CUT TO:

INT. IDP CAMP - OFFICE - DAY - A FEW WEEKS LATER

Mia stops by Regina's desk with Beckham. Regina sets a file down and takes the baby.

REGINA

There's my little cutie. Wow, she's getting so big.

MIA

Yeah, she's gained some weight. She's even trying to lift her head. How are things here? What's the latest nightmare?

REGINA

Well, let's see -- there's a small outbreak of cholera. Food shipment's delayed so we're on the brink of a shortage. What else? Oh, yeah, marauding bandits. Can't forget about them.

MIA

What's a nightmare without marauding bandits?

REGINA

Any news on the custody situation?

MIA

They're granting me temporary guardianship, but we'll have to stay in the camp until the paperwork's done. Beyond that, I have no clue.

REGINA

It's a lot of red tape, but you'll get through it. Have you told Emmanuel?

MIA

Not yet. I'm not sure what to say.

EXT. IDP CAMP - DAY

Mia and Emmanuel stroll past tents and makeshift dwellings. She notices him watching some KIDS playing soccer.

MIA

Would you like to play with them?

He shakes his head no.

MIA (CONT'D)

You know, I had a little boy who loved soccer just like you.

Emmanuel is surprised.

EMMANUEL

He is here?

MIA

No, he died.

Emmanuel nods with understanding.

EMMANUEL

Your boy, what is he called?

MIA

His name is Cole.

EMMANUEL

Cole.

MIA

I hear you're a really great soccer player.

EMMANUEL

Yes, it is true.

Mia laughs.

MIA
Sure you don't want to go play?
I'll wait for you right here.

EMMANUEL
You will not leave?

MIA
No, Emmanuel. I won't leave. I'll
be right here.

He thinks a moment, then breaks into a big smile.

EMMANUEL
Okay, I will play!

He takes off running.

EXT. MAMA EVANGELINE'S TENT - DAY

Bats flit through the trees as the sun slips beneath the hills. Mama Evangeline, Bijou and Solange cook on a clay stove. Bijou's children play quietly. Mia sits with Beckham on her lap. Emmanuel's mouth hangs open in disbelief.

EMMANUEL
The buildings reach all the way to
the sky?

MIA
Well, not all the way, but they're
very, very tall.

He tries to imagine. His face soon grows pensive.

MIA (CONT'D)
What are you thinking about?

EMMANUEL
I am thinking of what will happen
when you leave to America.

MIA
Well, I've been wanting to talk to
you about that. You see, I don't
have very much waiting for me back
in America, so I was thinking, if
it's okay with you, I might just
stay here awhile.

EMMANUEL
But America, it is your true home.

MIA
That's where I was born, but I
think your true home is wherever
(MORE)

MIA (CONT'D)
the people you care about most
are. And you, Beckham, Solange,
Mama Evangeline, Bijou, you're the
people I care about.

EMMANUEL
So you will stay here with us?

MIA
Would it be okay if I do?

EMMANUEL
Yes, it is very much okay.

MIA
And then, maybe one day soon, we
can all leave this camp and find a
better place to live.

EMMANUEL
Like a family?

MIA
Yes, like a family. I made a
promise to your mother that I
would look after you and your
sister and keep you both safe.

EMMANUEL
And you will keep that promise?

Mia smiles at Emmanuel.

MIA
Yes, Emmanuel. I will keep that
promise.

EXT. IDP CAMP - DAY

A bandana covers Mia's eyes. Emmanuel leads her by the hand.

MIA
Where are you taking me this time?

EMMANUEL
It is a special place.

They walk past a tilled field, where fragile green shoots
rise valiantly from the soil. Just beyond the field, Mama
Evangeline, Solange and Bijou are waiting near a tree.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)
Okay, stop. You can look now.

Mia removes the blindfold. Around the base of the tree are
painted rocks bearing the names of lost family and friends:

TRUDI, ALLEGRA, NEEMA, BIENVENU, CHRISTIAN, SOLOMON, their children. In the center is a rock dedicated to COLE.

She kneels down and traces her finger around his name.

MAMA EVANGELINE

Now they can rest in peace.

Tears flow as she stands. She turns to Emmanuel.

MIA

Thank you.

Mama Evangeline steps beside her.

MAMA EVANGELINE

This life can be very hard. We are
often broken by others.

(she takes Mia's hand)

But we are also mended by others.

They stand together against a stunning pink African sunset.