

Murder vs. Kill

CHAPTER 21

A mind expanded to a horrific event will never return to its original state. Tom's event wasn't planned or intentional — it definitely was not sinful. An hour away from the village and Tom was still reliving every detail of the killings and pointless murders. Running into battle and not away from it was never a second thought. Now that the dust had settled he would have to answer up. Tom checked for service on his cell phone. Calling the authorities was what he needed to do. The seasoned villager told him to keep quiet. The warning was well intended but Tom would take his chances with the state police.

Still no signal bars! Tom set his cell phone back on top of the graphene bag. *Maybe I should call the news media anonymously? I need to tell someone. Three school girls murdered a couple weeks ago, then a mother this morning... This has to stop! I'll shout the truth out to the news media! Thank God, three of mothers were spared due to Cain's training and self-sacrificing gallantry.*

Thirty more minutes of discernment and Tom shut off the motorhome after he crossed over the cattle guard. He got out and looked at his tire tracks from the day before. Without a backup spare tire another buried rebar bobby-trap and he'd be stuck in the middle of no place. With his head out the window he steered along the river bank and followed the old tire tracks. He steered around and past by the stacked river rocks — Abel's grave. The abandoned motorhome tire ahead would be a safe place to get back up on the road.

The rear tires spun on the clay bank when Tom tried to get up on the road. He drove another hundred feet along the river to a less steep place and made a run at the bank. He drew a deep breath when he was on the road again. In the rear view mirrors buzzards were feasting on the two hyena carcasses in the middle of the road a few feet away from the flattened tire. It looked like a blue plastic tarp or something had blown against and half covered the tire and rim. Tom rounded a

33 corner and was back up on the flat plateau section on the cutoff road.
34 He stopped to check his phone — there was one bar of signal.

35 Tom got out and hobbled around searching for a stronger signal.
36 Now there were at least a dozen vultures circling overhead. From the
37 top of a knoll it looked like the blue tarp was flapping in the wind
38 causing some of the scavengers to fly off. Tom retrieved the long gun
39 off the bed. Back on the knoll he sighted thru the scope. It wasn't a
40 blue plastic tarp — it was a blue Mudukare weaving cloth. Something
41 poked out from under the blue blanket to shush away the cleaning
42 birds of death. Tom looked closer — he saw a tiny brown arm!

43 The rifle worked as a make-shift crutch. Tom's hip gave out a few
44 times but he didn't fall face first. He stopped and from his hip fired into
45 the air. **Bam, bam, bam** all the raptors flew off.

46 When he pulled back the blue Mudukare weaved cloth a small girl
47 mumbled, "Why did they abandon me?" It hurt for her to speak with
48 her swelled, blistered and split lips. She went limp and her breathing
49 was shallow! She whimpered, "Please don't leave me."

50 Tom laid the rifle against the flat tire, then knelt down on one knee
51 and felt her head. The girl was burning up! He scooped her off the rim
52 and tire. The child was boney and no more than seventy pounds.
53 Begging God and with adrenaline Tom made it back to the motorhome
54 without falling. After he laid the girl on the bed he helped her to sip
55 water. "She asked again, "Why did they abandon me?"

56 "Who are they?" Tom replied as he placed a sleeve of crackers on
57 the bed. Tom pointed to some dried blood on the full length, blue cloth
58 pull over. "Are you okay?" he asked.

59 "Yes, month time," The girl replied and then sat up.

60 "Oh..." Tom deciphered her monthly situation and then asked.

61 "What's your name?"

62 "My name is Abidemi. I have a boy's name."

63 "Oh..." Tom thought about asking if her parents wanted a boy as he
64 opened a can of soup. His next contemplation was a short prayer.

65 *Thank you God that this innocence child wasn't attacked by wild*
66 *animals.* Tom heated up the can of soup and wrapped a cloth around
67 the pan. "Be careful it's hot."

68 After Abidemi had a few spoons of chicken bits and noodles she
69 asked, "Should I save you soup?"
70 "No, I'm good. There is fruit in the refrigerator, help yourself to
71 anything." Tom showed her how to unlatch the refrigerator door.
72 Abidemi's smooth brown skin, hazel eyes and wide smile was the
73 first feel good moment Tom had felt since coming to Africa. "I'm going
74 outside to try to call my wife."
75 There was a bluff ahead made up of round boulders; some were
76 bigger than a car. Tom inched himself to a high spot, his phone
77 displayed two signal bars. He speed dialed Beth.
78 "Tom are you okay? It's four in the morning!" Beth asked, anxious
79 and scared at the same time.
80 "I'm okay Beth. What do I do if a girl is on her period?"
81 "What Tom? You're breaking up." Beth was confused.
82 "What do I do if a girl is on her period?" Tom looked at his phone,
83 now only one bar.
84 "Tom a-a gir-l having her per--iod will know what to do. Un-less it's
85 the first t-ime. Make sure she k—eeps her-self clean with san-it-ary
86 napkins."
87 "Bet-h, I migh-t ne--ed your h-e--l---p..." Now there were no
88 signal bars! A satellite icon flashed on the phone display. Tom
89 remembers Dan's warning about all phones with GPS could be tracked
90 via satellites — anyplace on earth.
91 Back at the passenger door Tom reached thru the window and
92 grabbed the grapheme pouch off the dash. When he pulled open the
93 zip lock seal the Saint Michael holy card fell on the ground. Tom turned
94 off his phone and put it into the Graphene bag. Maybe it was best that
95 nobody could prove where he had been — just in case.
96 Inside he swiveled around in the passenger seat, stood and then
97 opened the small glass door to the shower. "My wife said you should
98 clean yourself up real good."
99 Abidemi got off the bed and looked into the shower. She took off
100 her blue head scarf and pulled the full length Kaftan style dress over
101 her head. Her feet and legs were covered with dust and some blood.
102 The rest of her brown skin was smooth and flawless.

103 Tom quickly opened the linen closet. "Use whatever you need. I'm
104 going to be outside." He hasty exited out the side door and spotted the
105 laminated holy card on the ground. He picked it up and then limped
106 back over to the rock outcropping. He leaned against one of the car
107 sized boulders and read the words on the back.

108
109 **Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in**
110 **battle. Be our protection against the wickedness**
111 **and snares of the devil; May God rebuke him, we**
112 **humbly pray; And do thou, O Prince of the**
113 **Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust into**
114 **hell Satan and all evil spirits who wander through**
115 **the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.**

116
117 Tom kept reading the prayer over and over. Every repetition he
118 paused to discern the battle he had just fought. His mind had been
119 stretched — it would never return to its original shape. After forty
120 minutes of prayer, meditation and reflection reality snapped back.
121 Assuagement should always be slow and steady — dwelling in the
122 darkness without help would be destructive.

123 With the sun now past the day's vortex Tom hoped that it had been
124 more than enough time to shower and to sanitary up. He lightly
125 knocked on the back door and waited — nothing. He went around to
126 the missing vent cover hole. The smell of gun powder from early that
127 morning had impregnated into the motorhome insulation. Tom peeked
128 in; Abidemi's damp black hair was sprawled over a white pillow.
129 Quietly, Tom pulled himself up into the driver's seat and started the
130 Sprinter. Fuel was at least twenty some miles away on a rough road.

131 Off in the distance there were Fulani herdsman pushing a herd of
132 cattle across an open prairie. *I should flag those men down and see if*
133 *they know why this girl was out in the middle of no place.* Something
134 told Tom to keep driving...

135 At the gravel to pavement transition Tom could not read the
136 **CLOSED** sign it was at least two hundred feet yards away. When he
137 turned off the pavement into the gravel parking lot he now saw that

138 the filling station was closed. Tom stopped around back, got out and
139 knocked on an opened window.

140 "No gas!" The merchant yelled on the other side of wire mesh.

141 "Any amount will help. I need to get to a hospital."

142 The merchant quickly came out the back door. "You okay?"

143 "I'm okay. I just need to get to a hospital for..." Something told
144 Tom to stop talking. A white man with a half clothed Fulani child would
145 be difficult to explain.

146 "You aren't okay!" The merchant pointed at all the blood on Tom's
147 stomach and chest."

148 Their conversation went back and forth with Tom saying that the
149 blood was from when hyenas killed his dogs. Most of the blood was
150 from the White Mamba when he took up a fighting position in a ditch.
151 Tom left those details out, they would require too much of an
152 explanation.

153 The merchant's son remembered Tom getting gas a few weeks
154 back and the large tip that he'd left. He came outside and explained
155 that they would be getting a load of black market fuel after dark. He
156 told Tom to park next to the cable spool table. He stated that most of
157 the fuel was spoken for but he'd give Tom enough to get to Jos Town.
158 Tom didn't have an option; he moved the motorhome home and then
159 woke up Abidemi.

160 She rubbed at her eyes, sat up and pulled the pillow against her
161 chest as though it was a big Teddy bear. "What's your name?" she
162 asked.

163 "My name is Tom. I will drop you off at a hospital when we get to a
164 Jos town."

165 "I don't want to go to a hospital. I want to go to school." Abidemi
166 started to cry.

167 Tom's heart knotted. "We can talk later." Tom got down on one
168 knee to be eye to eye with Abidemi. "Can we play a little game?"

169 "Yes! I like games," Abidemi already trusted Tom.

170 Okay, this is an important game that just you and I will play. It's a
171 game for big girls."

172 "I'm a big girl," Abidemi replied with enthusiasm.

173 “The game goes like this. Whenever we stop driving or you hear
174 me talking to somebody outside. You need to quietly go into the
175 bathroom and hide. Don’t say anything until I tell you to come out.”
176 “I like that game! It’s like hide-and-seek.”
177 “Don’t forget. If you hear me talking outside hide in the bathroom.”
178 “I won’t forget Mr. Tom.” Abidemi leaned forward and hugged Tom.
179 Tom left and went back to the screened window and ordered
180 something to eat and a cold beer. It took about twenty minutes to
181 cook a Skewer of Suya beef, yam, tomato and chunks of pineapple.
182 The Suya beef was as good as any Texas brisket back home.
183 While eating at the makeshift table Tom contemplated. *Dropping a
184 child off at a hospital emergency room where there will be security
185 cameras is problematic. If she makes a fuss I’d be in big trouble.
186 Guda Recreation Park was fenced and gated it felt safe both times
187 when I met Dan there. I’ll get fuel in Jos Town and drive on to Abuja.
188 I’ll order Abidemi breakfast and then leave her with the food vendors...*
189 An Army M35 deuce and a half pulling a flat bed trailer with six red
190 fifty gallon drums standing on end turned on its blinker. It plowed thru
191 the loose gravel and headed directly toward Tom. A cloud of dust and
192 black diesel fumes engulfed Tom.
193 Paul turned off the thunderous Army transport truck and then
194 rolled down the greenish bulletproof window. “I was hoping that I
195 would catch up with you!”
196 “Why’s that?” Tom remembered that Paul hauled supplies for the
197 Yelwa Zangam Village.
198 Paul opened the door and stood on the gas tank that had built in
199 steps. “I wanted to return Rin-tin-tin.” Paul climbed down.
200 “Is that Cain?” Tom looked up into the truck cab.
201 “Yes sir! He’s a wounded hero now.” Paul walked in front of the six
202 foot tall truck radiator grill. “Your veteran K-9 is still groggy from pain
203 killer. Outside of losing half an ear and the thru and thru shoulder shot
204 the village doc says he’ll be good as new in a month or so.”
205 From the passenger side Paul got Cain on to his shoulder. Cain no
206 longer had the Tampon ear bandages. The remaining half ear was

207 neatly trimmed and cauterized. Cain wagged his big bushy brown and
208 black tail.

209 Tom looked at where Cain's fur was shaved down to the skin and
210 the three black stitches. "I thought they had machine gunned Cain."

211 "Nope, just the one thru and thru gunshot to the shoulder. When I
212 got shot in Viet Nam I healed up in a month. But, the emotional
213 healing took years, until I finally got professional help," Paul offered.

214 "I don't think you can get mental help for a dog?" Tom replied.

215 "I'm talking about you. Don't try to sort out what happened all by
216 yourself." Paul paused. He knew that Tom's mind was expanding in
217 multiple directions — now wasn't the time to push mental healing.

218 "I'll be fine," Tom stared off into the distance.

219 "Grab that brown paper bag off the floor board." Paul hiked Cain
220 further up and over his shoulder. "The village elder wants you to rub
221 liniment on your butt wound and take two Kola pills in the morning
222 and at night."

223 Tom snatched the bag, before he could catch up, Paul opened the
224 side door. Cain was dead weight; almost like carrying a hundred pound
225 sack of rice. Paul carefully lowered Cain onto the bed. From the
226 opened sliding door Tom saw the shadows of two feet under the
227 bathroom door. He held out the paper bag. "Would you set this
228 medicine up front on the dash?"

229 When Paul took the pills and ointment Tom noticed the scar, he
230 pointed at Paul's left hand. "Was that from a gunshot?"

231 "Nope, that was from a knife." Paul quipped.

232 "Wow, was that during hand to hand combat?"

233 "No, I was tied to a chair... They wanted information..." Paul didn't
234 want to dwell in the past — it had taken years to mentally heal.

235 Selective Mutism (SM) is a severe anxiety disorder from traumatic
236 experiences like witnessing a shooting of a child or horrifying battle
237 field events that can trap an individual into a false sense of guilt, self
238 destructive life style or resort to suicide.

239 "Let's let Cain rest. Maybe you can share your story while we wait
240 for the fuel tanker to show up." Tom was anxious to shut the door.

241 "Are you sure, can you make it over to the table?" Paul pointed at
242 the cable spool.

243 "I'll rub some of that salve on and then I'll meet you over at the
244 table." Tom dropped his pants. The balm had a mentholated smell with
245 deep penetrating warmth. One thing Tom had learned about Africa was
246 that they had good home remedies. He heard the latch on the shower
247 door!

248 As he walked toward the table his hip already felt relief. Paul came
249 out of the store with two beers and an oily blotted bag of pork rinds.
250 They met at the cable spool. "Thanks, I'm hoping to be back in Lagos
251 before noon tomorrow." Tom twisted off the bottle cap. "If I get things
252 wrapped up here I can be back in Texas by the end of the month."

253 "I'll be leaving Africa too." Paul replied and opened his beer.

254 "What about the Yelwa Zangam villagers. Who is going to run
255 supplies for them?"

256 "I thought you might do it. But..." Paul swigged his beer.

257 "Not me! Tom resented being put on the spot. "I only came up
258 here to let them know that Glory and Praise will not be supporting the
259 school any longer. We will be closing the church in Lagos also."

260 "How are you planning to do that? Hang a sign on the door and
261 then leave." Paul replied sarcastically.

262 "I was planning to make the school closing announcement this
263 morning." Tom paused, "But that didn't work out."

264 "I know most of what happened today." Paul looked toward the
265 motorhome. "If you close the school the Boka Haram militants win."

266 "It's not my fight. I'm done with Africa!" Tom blurted.

267 "Why don't you let the Fulani herdsmen decide about the school?"

268 "You can't be serious! After what happened this morning would
269 they even want to risk having a school within fifty miles of their
270 village?"

271 "I don't know, ask them! Better yet ask the school girls." Paul's
272 voice didn't waver. "The way you know how to cut deals you could at
273 least get a satellite dish installed so they could do zoom classes."

274 Tom took a drink off the beer. "I do know an engineer back in
275 Texas that setups solar satellite feeds all over the world. I'll put you in
276 contact with him." Tom offered.

277 "That won't work. I'm leaving Africa too. My boss is sending me to
278 the Philippines."

279 "The Philippines?" Tom reached for the greasy bag. "Why there?"

280 "Because, there's been an upsurge of cults that are using the Bible
281 to promote and justify cannibalism. You know how the evil spirits
282 wander all through the world for the ruin of souls."

283 "What?" Tom released his grip on the bag of pork rinds."

284 "The Word calls out, that unless you eat the flesh of the Son and
285 drink His blood you have no life in you," Paul declared.

286 "John, chapter six, verse fifty-three is not to be taken literally,"
287 Tom rebuffed Paul's claim.

288 "Tell that to a Catholic that believes in Transubstantiation." Paul
289 spoke with authority.

290 "My wife is a Catholic. I'm sure she..." Tom's rebuttal was halted
291 by the sound of airbrakes from a water tender truck slowing down out
292 on the paved highway. The right blinker came on.

293 "I hope he brought diesel too." Paul waved at the driver.

294 "Diesel? That's a water truck not a fuel tanker." Tom rebutted.

295 "Don't believe everything you hear or read!" Paul yelled as the loud
296 tanker truck rumbled across the gravel. An ear splitting blast of air
297 belched out after the brakes released.

298 Tom swished away the dust, took a drink off his beer and then
299 poured the rest of the pale ale on the dry ground. When he stood
300 amazingly his hip felt better. The merchant came out the back door
301 and instructed his son to gas up the Sprinter first. Oddly, it was like
302 everyone knew that Tom was a protector and defended that needed to
303 be back on the road ASAP.

304 About ten miles down the road Tom pulled over and looked back
305 over his shoulder. Abidemi and Cain were curled up sleeping on the
306 bed. Tom turned back around and punched H-O-S-P-I-T-A-L into the
307 GPS. Before this day was over Abidemi would be in safe hands and
308 Tom would be one day closer to being back home in the United States.