

Western Morning

The Land Rover's rattling diesel engine outside melted into his throbbing cranium. "Davis!" Three blasts from the truck's horn slammed into his brain, making his teeth ache. "Davis?!" More honking, more hammers bludgeoned his forehead. "Davis. Last chance." He was pregnant with piss, his mouth an ashtray. More honking. He opened an eye. The light was a guillotine bisecting his pupil. "Davis!" The water glass on the nightstand was empty. He closed his eye. The Land Rover gurgled off. Morning songbirds peeped a painful symphony.

Three hours later Davis ate breakfast in the kitchen. Bira had mopped the tile floor. He felt guilty soiling it with his bare feet, even though they were cleaner than usual. Electricity had been working for four days without pause, allowing him to make toast. Milk and pineapples were ice cold in the rattling refrigerator. Swedish aid workers had left a giant bag of granola. There was enough propane to make coffee for one without feeling guilty. Bira walked into the kitchen to put away the mop. They had given up talking a while ago. Despite working at the compound for three years, Bira knew absolutely no English. Davis' version of her language was rudimentary. They smiled at one other. She admired his breakfast. He smiled at his breakfast. She left.

Davis knew what motivated war victims in the village — avoid malaria, eat, stay dry, start a farm, find clean water, pay school fees for a growing pile of kids, move somewhere else — but Bira's aspirations beguiled him. Servicing aid workers in repose is radically different from meeting them on the job dispensing medicine or Bibles. Bira had seen Davis in every state of vulnerability and knew he was in the doghouse. This was the third time he had slept through the Land Rover's exit this month. Davis was the current subject of hushed, accusatory vitriol that fell silent if he entered the room.

Last night's bar crowd, mainly teachers and nurses from Canada and Australia, reveled in making up funny acronyms for fake aid organizations. Davis' favorite was FUCKED, Funding Ugly Children's Knowledge of Evil and Destruction. Although, GAFF, Genocidal African Freedom Fund, was a close second. Davis' contribution, MASCOT, the Missionary Alliance of Slavery, Control and Omnipotent Terror, got a few laughs. He had spent 40 US dollars on vodka, beer, dusty pizza, water, cigarettes and pot. Had the others at the table been up for it, he would have blown another 40 on a cab to score coke in the hooker zone downtown. The others on his team stopped going out at night with Davis weeks ago.

Bira had cleaned his room by the time he finished washing up after breakfast. The bed made, his ashtray empty, he longed for a joint and more sleep.