Left to Tell

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF IMMACULÉE ILIBAGIZA

Immaculée Ilibagiza was born in the small village of Mataba in Rwanda, where she was raised in a close-knit Roman Catholic family. Ilibagiza excelled in school and earned a place at the prestigious Lycée de Notre Dame d'Afrique and a scholarship to the National University in Butare. The final year of her studies were interrupted by the Rwandan genocide of 1994, during which all but one of Ilibagiza's immediate family members were murdered. She escaped by a hiding out in a bathroom along with a group of other Tutsi women. Following the genocide, she worked for the United Nations and met her husband, Bryan Black, an American who travelled to Rwanda with the UN to work on the International Criminal Tribunal through which the perpetrators of the genocide were prosecuted. In 1998, Ilibagiza moved to New York with her husband, where she continued to work for the UN. She decided to share her story in the book *Left to Tell*, which became a New York Times bestseller and propelled her into a career as a leading speaker on issues of faith and forgiveness. She has two children and has written six additional books. She is also the recipient of multiple honorary doctorates and humanitarian awards.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Left to Tell details the horrific Rwandan genocide of 1994. As Immaculée explains, a long and complicated history created the disastrous climate in which it was possible for the genocide to take place. While the tribal separation of Rwandans preexisted colonialism, ethnic tensions in the country were severely worsened by the colonial presence. Belgian colonizers conferred advantages to the Tutsi elite, while also making the distinction between the tribes more stark by demanding that Rwandans carry an identity card determining their tribe. This led to Hutus resenting Tutsis. At the same time, even as tensions increased, intermarriage remained extremely common, and Tutsis and Hutus lived together harmoniously, attending the same schools and churches and speaking the same language. This widespread intermingling made the genocide even more shocking, because—as Immaculée explains—Hutus ended up massacring their longtime friends, neighbors, and even family members. The genocide lasted from April 7 until mid-July 1994, during which up to a million people, most of them Tutsis, were murdered. Following the genocide, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by Paul Kagame, took control of the country. The UN established an International Criminal Tribunal which prosecuted those responsible for the genocide. At the same time, it was impossible to prosecute all those who committed murder, as the number of killers was far too high. A program of reconciliation and reinstitution of a traditional village court system was implemented in order to help restore Rwandan society. Today, many Tutsi survivors and their descendants live alongside those who participated as killers in the genocide.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Ilibagiza continued the narrative and themes established in *Left to Tell* in her 2008 biography, *Led by Faith: Rising from the Ashes of the Rwandan Genocide*. Other nonfiction books that tell the story of the Rwandan genocide include Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*, Roméo Dallaire's *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, and Jean Hatzfeld's twinned books *Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak* and *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*. In her debut novel, *Running the Rift*, Naomi Benaron tells the fictional story of a Tutsi boy who, like Immaculée, finds that his natural talents and ambition are thwarted by the oppression of Tutsis. Similarly, *Cockroaches*, a memoir by the Rwandan Tutsi author Scholastique Mukasonga, tells the story of a happy childhood in a Tutsi family that was devastated by the genocide.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Genocide*
- **When Written:**
- **Where Written:** New York City, USA
- **When Published:** March 2006
- **Literary Period:** Twenty-First-Century African Nonfiction
- **Genre:** Religious Memoir
- **Setting:** Mataba, Kibuye, Rwanda
- **Climax:** When Immaculée is almost killed when arriving at the French camp but escapes and realizes she has survived the genocide
- **Antagonist:** The Interahamwe and other Hutu extremists
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

The difficulty of forgiveness. While his sister is famous for her willingness to forgive those who murdered her family and other Tutsis in the genocide, Immaculée's brother Aimable has stated that he finds it difficult to forgive because he has never received a sincere apology from any of the killers.

Film adaptation. *Left to Tell* is currently being adapted into a major film, with a planned release in 2018.

PLOT SUMMARY

Immaculée hears the killers calling out her name, saying "we know she's in here somewhere." They are her former friends and neighbors, people that she knows well. She holds her father's **rosary** and prays to God to keep her alive. The killers move on, but Immaculée will soon come to learn that although her life was spared, she was not "saved."

Immaculée was born in Mataba, a village in the province of Kibuye. As a child, she was surrounded by the love of her family, friends, and neighbors. She did not know about tribal differences and did not hear the words Tutsi or Hutu until she started school. Immaculée's father, Leonard, was strong and protective, and her mother, Rose, was energetic, hard-working, and nurturing. Both were teachers. Immaculée's family had two cars, and some people in her village called Leonard Muzungu, which means both "white man" and "rich person." The family was devoutly Catholic, and when Immaculée was a child, she and her friend Jeanette approached a priest, Father Clement, about becoming nuns. The eldest of Immaculée's three brothers, Aimable, was introverted and shy. Her second oldest brother, Damascene, was "brilliant" and cheeky; he and Immaculée were best friends. Her baby brother, Vianney, was "lovable but pesky."

When Immaculée was in fourth grade, her teacher, Buhoro, scolded her for not knowing whether she was Hutu or Tutsi. Despite being well educated, Immaculée and her brothers did not know about the ethnic divide in Rwanda and how this was shaped by German and Belgian colonialism. Immaculée remembers a time when she was three years old and her family hid from Hutu extremists in the house of a Hutu friend named Rutakamize. At the time, Immaculée didn't understand what was happening, but now she knows that the extremists were killing Tutsis and burning their homes.

At age fifteen, Immaculée was ranked second in her class of sixty students. She planned to attend college and become a pilot, professor, or psychologist. However, she soon learned that she had not been selected to receive a scholarship to attend high school because she was Tutsi. Determined that his daughter would still go to high school, Leonard sold two cows in order to pay for her tuition. After studying hard, Immaculée passed the exam to be accepted at the Lycée de Notre Dame d'Afrique—one of the top schools in Rwanda. Although Immaculée loved the Lycée, people in the surrounding area were highly hostile to Tutsis.

In October 1990, in Immaculée's final year at the Lycée, war breaks out when Tutsi rebels cross the border from Uganda and begin fighting the Rwandan army. Shortly after, a local Hutu man threatens to kill Immaculée as punishments for "what your rebel brothers are doing." The government begins to spread propaganda about Tutsis, calling them "cockroaches."

Immaculée graduates from the Lycée and is awarded a scholarship to attend the National University in Butare, meaning she will be the first in her family to attend college. Immaculée adores university life and begins dating a fellow student named John. Leonard does not care that John is Hutu but is concerned that he is Protestant instead of Catholic. Immaculée begins to witness the Interahamwe, a youth wing of President Habyarimana's political party, harassing and beating up Tutsis. The president signs a peace agreement with the Tutsi rebels, but soon after, a colonel in the Rwandan military, Theoneste Bagosora, promises to bring an "apocalypse" to Rwanda.

Immaculée goes home for Easter, but her family's celebration is darkened by Damascene's warnings that the Interahamwe have grenades and a list of the Tutsi families in the area. Damascene urges that they escape, and Immaculée agrees. However, Leonard responds that their fear is making them irrational. That night, Damascene bursts into Immaculée's room to tell her that President Habyarimana has been killed. Immaculée's family listens to the radio and learns that her Uncle Twaza is one of a large number of Tutsis killed in revenge for the president's murder. It is the morning of April 7, 1994, and the genocide has begun.

The Rwandan prime minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, is killed while giving a phone interview to the BBC. Rose begins to pack their bags. That night, the family hears on the radio that ten Belgian UN Peacekeepers have been killed, and that Westerners are fleeing Rwanda. In the morning, the Interahamwe begin killing people in Immaculée's village. Thousands of men flock to Immaculée's house to ask Leonard for advice. For a brief time, the sheer number of Tutsis keeps the Interahamwe away. Damascene and Leonard insist that Immaculée goes to hide in Pastor Murinzi's house, because, as a young woman, it is too dangerous for her to remain there. At first Immaculée refuses, but eventually she agrees to go along with a family friend named Augustine.

Immaculée has known Pastor Murinzi since she was a child; he is also John's uncle. After Immaculée arrives at the pastor's house, Damascene comes to visit and says that their house has been burned down. Leonard and Rose escaped on a motorbike, but he does not know where they went. Damascene says goodbye and leaves.

Later, Pastor Murinzi shepherds five more Tutsi women into the small bedroom where Immaculée is staying. That same day, the killers come by, shouting "Kill them all!" The women hide in a crawl space, and after the killers leave, Pastor Murinzi laments that they will need another solution, as he is sure next time the killers will keep coming back to search the house. He tells Immaculée that it is too dangerous for him to hide men,

and that Vianney and Augustine therefore cannot stay. Immaculée ushers the boys out, trying to assure them that everything will be fine.

Pastor Murinzi shows Immaculée and the other women a small bathroom where they must hide in absolute silence, so that the pastor's own children will not even realize that they are there. The oldest of the women is fifty-five and the youngest is only seven. Immaculée hears a mob of killers coming again, and is shocked when—looking at the mob from the window—she sees many of her friends, neighbors, and classmates among them. Immaculée spends almost all of her time praying. Although she is terrified, she never fails to be comforted by God's love.

One day, she overhears Pastor Murinzi's son, Sembeba, telling the pastor that he thinks the massacre of Tutsis is a good thing. Sembeba mentions the rumors that his father is hiding Tutsis inside the house. Pastor Murinzi furiously sends Sembeba out, reminding him that his own mother was Tutsi. Later, Pastor Murinzi comes into the bathroom looking traumatized. He explains that the whole country has been shut down and will remain so until all Tutsis are dead. He tells the women that they may be "the only Tutsis left alive in all of Rwanda." Immaculée is devastated, but finds a glimmer of hope when she hears a BBC radio broadcast saying that the RPF (the Tutsi rebels) have arrived in Kigali.

Days later, Pastor Murinzi comes in and calls Leonard a "bad Tutsi," saying that he was helping the RPF plan an extermination of Hutus, and that if the women in the bathroom are killed, it will be because of Immaculée. Immaculée argues that the pastor is only blindly believing propaganda. As Pastor Murinzi leaves, Immaculée asks to borrow a Bible from him, and he agrees. She spends fifteen to twenty hours a day praying, and her relationship with God grows stronger than ever.

Pastor Murinzi lets his two most trusted children, Lechim and Dusenge, in on the secret of the women hiding in the bathroom. Lechim and Dusenge are kind to the women, helping to bring them food and tea. Soon, two more Tutsi women named Malaba and Solange join those already in the bathroom. The women tell stories of the horror outside. As time passes, all eight women become thin, unwell, and infected with lice. While listening to the radio, Immaculée has a sudden moment of insight: she decides to learn English so that she can communicate with English-speaking Tutsis after the war. She also has a vision of herself one day working at the United Nations. Using a dictionary Pastor Murinzi gives her, Immaculée finds joy in studying English every day.

In early June, John arrives at the pastor's house, having fled Kigali after the RPF arrived. In the bathroom, John and Immaculée embrace. However, John does not make an effort to be kind to Immaculée and, after some time, she realizes the love between them is gone. Soon, there is news that French soldiers are coming to Rwanda and will set up camps for Tutsi refugees. One night, after everyone is asleep, Pastor Murinzi secretly brings the women into the main house to watch a movie with the volume turned off. One of the pastor's servants sees the light of the TV and informs the killers that the rumors are true: Pastor Murinzi is hiding Tutsis in his house. The killers search the house, shouting Immaculée's name. Immaculée prays fiercely, and the killers leave.

In early July, another houseboy tries to insist on cleaning the small bathroom, making it clear that he suspects the women are hiding in there. Pastor Murinzi manages to get in contact with the French soldiers, who agree to take in the women. The killers will come back the next day, so at 2 A.M., the pastor sneaks the women out, with his sons and John guarding them. The women are taken in at the French camp, where Immaculée sees two old friends, Jean Baptiste and Jean Paul. She learns that her entire family has been killed except Aimable, who is away studying in Senegal. Immaculée is soon taken to another French camp, where she finds her aunts, Esperance and Jeanne. Esperance gives Immaculée a letter that Damascene wrote to her before he died. The letter is dated May 6th, 1994, and is blurred with teardrops. In the middle of writing it, Damascene learned that Leonard, Rose, and Vianney were all killed. Immaculée learns of the horrifying details of Damascene's final days, but also of his courage when faced with his killers.

Once the soldiers learn that Immaculée is fluent in French, they ask for her assistance in translating the stories of the Tutsi refugees, most of whom can only speak Kinyarwanda. Before long, however, the French camp is disbanded, and the French soldiers take Immaculée and the other refugees halfway to an RPF camp, making them walk the rest of the way alone. When they arrive, the RPF soldiers are suspicious as they do not believe that so many Tutsis could still be alive. Yet miraculously, one of the soldiers—an old Hutu student of Rose's named Bazil—recognizes Immaculée and confirms that she is Tutsi.

Eventually Immaculée and eleven other refugees go to Kigali to stay at the house of Aloise, a spirited disabled woman who credits Rose with saving her life when she was young. In Kigali, Immaculée immediately sets her mind to getting a job at the UN, and practices her English in preparation. However, she is told that there are no jobs and is turned away. She returns to the university in Butare, which has been decimated. However, she is able to retrieve her letters, her diploma, and thirty dollars of scholarship money that she had stashed away. She returns to the UN, where eventually a kind man named Pierre Mehu gives her a job. Soon, Immaculée is reunited with her college roommate, Sarah, who suggests that Immaculée move in with her. Immaculée agrees. She writes to Aimable to tell him the terrible news about their family.

Immaculée returns to Mataba, where she finds Damascene's mutilated body. She takes Damascene's remains and buries them, along with Rose's body, at their destroyed family home. Immaculée goes back to Kigali, but after seeing her family in a dream, she returns to Mataba to forgive the killers who

murdered Rose and Damascene.

In the epilogue, Immaculée explains that in late 1995, she was reunited with Aimable. Today, he is a doctor who lives in Kigali with his wife and child. Immaculée prays for God to send her a soulmate—a Catholic man from anywhere in the world to be her husband. Soon after, she meets Bryan Black, an American who is in Rwanda to set up the International Criminal Tribunal. Two years later, the pair are married in a traditional Rwandan ceremony. They move to the US and have two children, Nikeisha and Bryan, Jr. Immaculée now works for the UN in New York City. She concludes by advocating the power of forgiveness and love.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Immaculée Ilibagiza – Immaculée is the author and narrator of the book. Born in Mataba, a village in the province of Kibuye, Rwanda, Immaculée has a happy childhood surrounded by the love of her parents and brothers. She is extremely intelligent and excels in school, gaining a place at the prestigious Lycée de Notre Dame d'Afrique and a scholarship to attend the National University at Butare. She is deeply religious from early childhood, and as a child she inquires about becoming a nun. The happiness and success of Immaculée's early life are blighted by the Rwandan civil war and genocide of 1994. During the genocide, she hides in a bathroom along with other Tutsi women and girls in the house of Pastor Murinzi. During this time, she turns to God as a source of resilience, strength, and optimism. Despite the appalling circumstances, her faith is enhanced by the experience. Furthermore, she teaches herself English in the bathroom, which allows her to gain a job at the UN after the genocide ends. Although almost all members of Immaculée's family were killed in the genocide, she maintains a positive outlook on life and insists on the importance of forgiveness. She marries Bryan Black, an American, and moves to New York City to continue working for the UN. She is the mother of two children and regularly returns to Rwanda, as well as traveling the world, in order to advocate the importance of faith, hope, and forgiveness.

Leonard Ukulikiyinkindi – Leonard is Immaculée's father. He is an intelligent, kind, and protective man who is a pillar of his local community. After working as a teacher, he is eventually promoted to chief administrator for all the Catholic schools in the district. He is deeply religious, and he encourages his children to work hard in school and be devout in their faith. If Leonard has any flaws, it is his naïveté and particularly his willingness to trust those who have betrayed him before. Of course, these are also good qualities, as they demonstrate Leonard's love of humanity and hope in people's good nature. However, they ultimately lead Leonard to be killed when, early on in the genocide, he goes to the government office to request food for the Tutsi refugees and is shot in response.

Marie Rose Kankindi – Marie Rose, known as Rose, is Immaculée's mother. She is a teacher and, like her husband, is someone to whom others in the community turn for support. She is known for her exceptional kindness and her inability to turn away anyone in need, which leads her to spend most of her time and energy helping others. She always worries about the safety of her family, and she expresses the hope that she dies before any of them. Ultimately, this wish is granted, though in extraordinarily sad circumstances—she is killed toward the beginning of the genocide, after unsuccessfully asking her Hutu friend Murenge for help.

Aimable – Aimable is Immaculée's oldest brother, and the only other member of her immediate family who survives the genocide. He is quiet, reflective, and mature beyond his years. He is conducting postgraduate research on a scholarship in Senegal during the genocide, and thus he escapes the killings. He and Immaculée eventually reunite, although they are not at first able to talk about what happened. He works as a veterinarian and settles in Kigali with his wife and child.

Damascene – Damascene is Immaculée's second oldest brother, and the person to whom she is the closest—she describe him as her "soul mate." Intelligent, funny, charming, and righteous, Damascene earns a master's degree at a young age and works as a history teacher. During the genocide, he seeks refuge with his Hutu friend Bonn and attempts to flee to Zaire, but he is eventually betrayed by members of Bonn's family. He is murdered by killers who taunt him about his intelligence, but he remains defiant and dignified in his final moments.

Vianney – Vianney is Immaculée's younger brother. Immaculée calls him "lovable but pesky," and admits that she always sees him as a baby no matter how old he gets. Vianney is home from boarding school when the genocide breaks out. He attempts to seek refuge with Pastor Murinzi along with Augustine, but Pastor Murinzi turns him away because he is male. He ends up being killed in a massacre at a stadium.

President Juvénal Habyarimana – President Habyarimana is the leader of the Hutu government in the period leading up to the genocide. He helps to stoke ethnic tensions by instituting ethnic roll calls in classrooms, limiting the number of places for Tutsis at schools and universities, and calling RPF soldiers "foreigners" despite the fact that they are the descendants of Rwandan Tutsis expelled by Hutu persecution. He eventually signs a peace treaty with the RPF, but shortly afterwards he is killed when his plane is shot down, triggering the genocide.

Kabayi – Kabayi is a Hutu man who was formerly a friend of Leonard's. He is the regional mayor of Kibuye before and during the genocide, and he betrays Leonard by not intervening in his wrongful arrest and starving him while in prison. After

Leonard is released, Kabayi pretends it was all a misunderstanding.

John – John is Immaculée's boyfriend during her university years. He is Hutu and protestant, but this does not matter to Immaculée as he is kind and deeply religious. They get engaged, but John embarrasses her by breaking off the engagement at the last minute. John is Pastor Murinzi's nephew and he visits Immaculée while she is in the bathroom. However, he is cold and callous during this time, and Immaculée realizes that their love is gone forever.

Pastor Murinzi – Pastor Murinzi is a Hutu protestant pastor who lives in Mataba. He agrees to shelter Immaculée and other Tutsi women and girls, putting his life at risk to do so. At the same time, he is resentful of Leonard and sometimes says cruel and baseless things about him. Despite the tensions that at points exist between the pastor and Immaculée, Immaculée is extremely grateful to him for risking his life to save hers.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Father Clement – Father Clement is a priest to whom Immaculée inquires as a young child about becoming a nun.

Jeanette – Jeanette is a childhood friend of Immaculée.

Buhoro – Buhoro is Immaculée's elementary school teacher. He scolds her for not knowing her tribal affiliation, and Immaculée later learns he is a Hutu extremist. During the genocide, he is one of the people who betrayed Damascene.

Rutakamize – Rutakamize is a Hutu friend of Leonard and Rose who helps them during the 1973 massacre of Tutsis.

Sarah – Sarah is one of Immaculée's friends from Lycée. They also attend the National University in Butare together and live as roommates. Sarah is Hutu and from Kigali. After the genocide, Immaculée lives with her for a while and calls Sarah her "sister."

Clementine – Clementine is a friend of Immaculée's and a fellow Tutsi student at Lycée.

Mr. Gagihi – Mr. Gagihi is Immaculée's Civil Education teacher at Lycée. He informs Immaculée when war breaks out, and paints the RPF soldiers in an unsympathetic light.

Danida – Danida is a Hutu girl at Lycée with an irrational fear of Tutsis.

Madame Sirake – Madame Sirake is a "neighborhood gossip" in Mataba.

Theoneste Bagosora – Theoneste Bagosora is a Hutu extremist military officer and one of the instigators of the genocide.

Augustine – Augustine is Sarah's younger brother and a friend of Vianney. During the beginning of the genocide, he panics because although he is Hutu, he looks Tutsi. He and Vianney are killed together in the stadium massacre.

Paul Kagame – Paul Kagame is the leader of the RPF. After the genocide, he is elected President of Rwanda.

Agathe Uwilingiyimana – Agathe Uwilingiyimana is the moderate Hutu prime minister in the leadup to the genocide. She is assassinated by Hutu extremists while giving a live interview, and this event helps trigger the genocide.

Janet – Janet is a Hutu friend of Immaculée's from elementary school who turns on her when the genocide begins.

Lechim – Lechim is one of Pastor Murinzi's sons and a friend of Immaculée's from primary school. He is the first boy she ever kissed.

Dusenge – Dusenge is one of Pastor Murinzi's daughters.

Nzima – Nzima is one of Vianney's teachers from high school who seeks shelter at Pastor Murinzi's house. After the pastor turns him away, Nzima is murdered.

Therese – At 55, Therese is the oldest woman who hides in the bathroom with Immaculée. She is there with her daughters Claire and Sanda.

Athanasia – Athanasia is one of the girls who hides in the bathroom with Immaculée. She is 14 years old.

Beata – Beata is another of the girls who hides in the bathroom. She is 12 years old.

Claire – Claire is one of Therese's daughters, who hides in the bathroom.

Sanda – Sanda is Therese's daughter and, at 7, is the youngest girl in the bathroom.

Sembeba – Sembeba is one of Pastor Murinzi's sons and the only one of the pastor's children to support the genocide. He threatens to betray his father for hiding Tutsis, despite the fact that Sembeba's own mother was Tutsi.

Sony – Sony is an elderly Tutsi widow who is killed when Pastor Murinzi refuses to offer her shelter in his house.

Malaba – Malaba is a young Tutsi woman who comes to join the women hiding in the bathroom.

Solange – Solange is a Tutsi teenager who also comes to join the women hiding in the bathroom.

Marianne – Marianne is one of Pastor Murinzi's daughters. She had been hiding Malaba and Solange and her house in northern Rwanda, but is forced to send them south to Mataba after people start getting suspicious.

Jean Paul – Jean Paul is an old friend of Immaculée's, with whom she reunites in the French camp. He is Tutsi, but looks Hutu, which allowed him to survive the genocide. He tells Immaculée the sad stories of how each of her family members was killed.

Jean Baptiste – Jean Baptiste is Jean Paul's brother. He is badly wounded in the genocide, but survives.

Laurent – Laurent is a Hutu friend of Jean Paul's who hid both

Jean Paul and Jean Baptiste during the genocide, but participated in killing Tutsis.

Murenge – Murenge is a Hutu friend of Rose's who betrays her during the genocide.

Esperance – Esperance is one of Immaculée's maternal aunts who survived the genocide by hiding in the forest.

Jeanne – Jeanne is another of Immaculée's aunts who also survived the genocide.

Bonn – Bonn is a Hutu friend of Damascene's who hid him and tried to help him escape to Zaire. After Damascene was killed, Bonn reportedly went mad with grief.

Nsenge – Nsenge is another close friend of Damascene's who tried to help him escape. Her brother Simoni betrayed Damascene, leading to his death.

Semahe – Semahe is a former friend of Damascene's who helped to kill him and then deeply regretted it.

The Captain – The captain of the French base camp takes a liking to Immaculée and offers to kill Hutus for her.

Florence – Florence is a Tutsi survivor whom Immaculée meets in the French base camp.

Pierre – Pierre is a French soldier who falls in love with Immaculée. He is sad but understanding when she rejects him.

Aloise – Aloise is a friend of Rose and Leonard's who uses a wheelchair after contracting polio as a child. Known for her intelligence and good humor, she takes Immaculée to live with her in Kigali after the genocide.

Bazil – Bazil is a Hutu friend of Immaculée's from Mataba who went to fight with the RPF. His entire family is killed in the genocide.

Major Ntwali – Major Ntwali is the leader of the RPF camp.

Fari – Fari is Aloise's Tutsi husband. He survives the genocide.

The Ghanaian Guard – The Ghanaian guard is a friendly man who works at the UN.

Dr. Abel – Dr. Abel is one of Immaculée's old professors from the university in Butare.

The Colonel – The colonel is a Tutsi soldier who helps Immaculée access her old dorm room in Butare.

Pierre Mehu – Pierre Mehu is a spokesman for UNAMIR at the UN. He takes a liking to Immaculée and gives her a job.

Colonel Gueye – Colonel Gueye is a kind Senegalese officer who escorts Immaculée back to Mataba by helicopter.

Captain Traore – Captain Traore is another kind man who protects Immaculée during her trip back to Mataba.

Felicien – Felicien is the leader of the Hutu gang who killed Rose and Damascene. Formerly a charming, handsome, and successful businessman, he is destroyed when forced to confront the crimes he committed during the genocide. Immaculée takes pity on him and forgives him.

Bryan Black – Bryan Black is an American man who comes to Rwanda to set up the International Criminal Tribunal. He and Immaculée marry, and eventually move back to the United States together.

Nikeisha – Nikeisha is Immaculée's daughter.

Bryan, Jr. – Bryan, Jr. is Immaculée's son.

Uncle Twaza Immaculée's uncle, who gets killed in a massacre of Tutsi families.

Simoni The brother of Nsenge. Simoni betrays Damascene as Damscene attempts to hide from the Hutus, leading quickly to Damascene's murder by a number of Hutus.

Semana The regional mayor in charge of Kibuye some time after the mass killings. He takes Immaculée to see the man who led the gang who killed her mother and brother. When Immaculée forgives the man, Semana is shocked.

TERMS

Tutsi – Tutsis are a tribe of people living in Rwanda and other African nations such as Burundi, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), and Tanzania. Tutsis are thought to be physically distinguishable by their tall height, lighter skin, and thin noses, though as **Immaculée** points out, these physical characteristics are not a reliable way of determining a person's tribe due to years of intermarriage. They are a minority population in Rwanda and were persecuted in the genocide, during which about 70% of the Tutsi population in Rwanda was murdered.

Hutu – Hutus are the majority population in Rwanda. They are thought to be identifiable by their shorter stature, darker skin, and broader noses (in comparison to Tutsis), but again, these physical markers are unreliable. During the genocide, Hutu extremists encouraged all Hutus to take up arms and murder Tutsis.

Zaire – Zaire is the former name of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; the nation was known by this name between 1971 and 1997.

Muzungu – Muzungu is a word that means both "rich person" and "white man." Its double meaning speaks to the ongoing impact of European colonialism in Rwanda, which resulted in white people being associated with wealth and authority.

Interahamwe – The Interahamwe began as a youth movement of the Hutu government in the time leading up to the genocide. The term means "those who attack together," and the Interahamwe were one of the earliest groups to begin harassing, attacking, and murdering Tutsis. Young Hutu men, many of them unemployed, were persuaded to join the Interahamwe by the promise of free alcohol and drugs. They

were recognizable by the colors and demonic costumes they wore.

Scapular – A scapular is a Christian garment consisting of two pieces of cloth. As **Immaculée** explains, it is thought that wearing it can help speed access to heaven after death.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

GOD, FAITH, AND MIRACLES

In *Left to Tell*, Immaculée Ilibagiza explains how living through the Rwandan genocide—an event so horrifying that one might expect it to lead to a crisis of faith—ultimately strengthened her Catholic faith and relationship with God. Indeed, she credits her miraculous survival to God, and in this way, the book depicts faith as a self-reinforcing cycle, wherein Immaculée's trust in God produces miracles, which in turn bolster her religious convictions. As Immaculée's faith grows stronger, so does she as a person, and it is this strength that helps enable her survival. While the overt aim of the book is not necessarily to convert people to Christianity, Immaculée's main message is that in the midst of the genocide, her faith was greater than ever, and that this experience points not only to the importance of faith but to the existence of God.

Immaculée was always a very religious person. Her family was devoutly Catholic and, as a child, she visited a local priest to enquire about becoming a nun. Although Immaculée's faith was always strong, it was made far stronger during the genocide. There are a number of reasons for this. In the midst of the horror, Immaculée relied on God more than ever, putting her survival in His hands. Furthermore, there was essentially nothing to occupy her while she was hiding silently in Pastor Murinzi's bathroom, and thus at certain points she spent fifteen to twenty hours a day inside the bathroom praying. She also borrowed a Bible from the pastor, using it (and a dictionary) to teach herself English. While the world around her was falling apart, Immaculée focused her attention entirely on God. This preserved her sanity and will to survive while increasing the zeal of her faith.

Immaculée describes several moments in which she believes God directly intervened in order to save her life. For example, in a sudden moment of inspiration, she persuades Pastor Murinzi to place his wardrobe in front of the door to the bathroom, thereby obscuring the bathroom door from view. This means that when the killers come to search the pastor's house, they do not realize that the bathroom even exists. Immaculée credits this moment of inspiration to God. Later, there are several moments in which the killers are inside the house, calling Immaculée's name and implying that they know where she is. However, each time, the killers ultimately leave, which Immaculée again believes was God leading them away from her. When she and the other women in the bathroom finally escape the pastor's house and travel to a camp run by French soldiers, they pass a group of Interahamwe who do not appear to notice them. Immaculée believes that God "blinded" the men in this moment in order to allow her to escape.

During the genocide, Immaculée is totally reliant on her faith not only because she is constantly on the brink of death but also because she is totally alone outside of her relationship with God. Except for her brother Amiable who is studying in Senegal, Immaculée's immediate family members are all killed in the genocide, along with all their Tutsi friends and neighbors. The women with whom Immaculée hides in Pastor Murinzi's bathroom were essentially strangers to her before they were stuck there together, and they cannot speak to each other due to the risk of being discovered by Pastor Murinzi's staff or family members. In the midst of her extreme isolation, Immaculée turns to God and finds comfort in knowing that, because of Him, she is not alone. Her relationship with God is one of the only reliable things in her life, and it is also one of the only things linking her experience before the genocide to everything that comes after.

Throughout the book, Immaculée describes moments when she was seconds from seemingly certain death. Each of these times, she prayed as fiercely as she could, and each time, she escaped. However, it is not just her survival that Immaculée credits as a miracle. Toward the end of the book, she describes Rwanda's incredible revitalization in the years after the genocide, noting that "to me, there is no greater proof of the existence of miracles than the depth, scope, and speed at which my African homeland has been restored and transformed." Immaculée's identification of miracles where others might not see them is further testament to the strength of her faith. Rather than looking to the genocide as proof that God has abandoned Rwanda, Immaculée finds evidence of God's love wherever she can. In this way, Immaculée's memoir creates a portrait of human faith as a deeply resilient thing which needn't be destroyed by tragedy—but can instead be strengthened.

LOVE VS. PREJUDICE

In *Left to Tell*, Immaculée provides a testament to both the great love and intense prejudice she has experienced in life. One of the most startling lessons of her story is that love and prejudice, despite being opposing forces, often coexist alongside one another. Love can turn into prejudice with disturbing speed, yet her story shows that the opposite is also true. While Immaculée acknowledges

the frightening and destructive power of prejudice, she believes love to be the more powerful force and the one that will ultimately prevail. While it may be tempting to respond to prejudice with more prejudice, the book testifies that the only way prejudice can be defeated is with love.

As a child, Immaculée was surrounded by so much love that she barely understood what prejudice was. Her family was very tight-knit, and both her parents were respected and beloved members of the community. As a result, Immaculée felt a close sense of kinship with everyone around her. She explains that in childhood, she wasn't aware of the ethnic divide in Rwanda and didn't even know if she was Tutsi or Hutu. Immaculée's descriptions of her innocence at this time show that prejudice is unnecessary and illogical; it doesn't add anything to society—in fact, its impact is purely destructive. The fact that Immaculée didn't know there was any difference between Tutsis and Hutus shows that any differences that do exist between the two ethnicities are meaningless. Immaculée emphasizes the point that, prior to the genocide, there was much intermixing between the ethnicities. Indeed, high rates of intermarriage meant that the physical qualities thought to distinguishe Tutsis and Hutus were barely applicable anymore.

The mixing of Tutsis and Hutus and the strong, pervasive love Immaculée felt as a child make the genocide's arrival shocking. At the same time, it is also clear that Immaculée's experience of tolerance and love does not tell the whole story of pre-genocide Rwanda. As Immaculée explains, German and Belgian colonialism stoked the ethnic divide between Hutus and Tutsis, as the colonizers favored working with Tutsis, thereby giving elitie Tutsis greater power and wealth than Hutus. Tensions between Hutus and Tutsis had long been a part of life in Rwanda and, although she didn't realize it at the time, Immaculée's family had previously had to temporarily evacuate their village in order to escape Hutu persecution. The image Immaculée presents of pre-genocide Rwanda as a "paradise" of love and tolerance is thus partly a product of her childish innocence and her family's kindness more than it is a reflection of reality. However, Immaculée makes use of this innocent perspective to underscore the essential meaninglessness of the ethnic divisions that are the basis of the Rwandan conflict.

Left to Tell explores the frightening speed with which love (or at least tolerance) can turn into prejudice. When people in her village begin killing Tutsis, Immaculée is shocked to see her former friends among the killers. It seems incomprehensible that people who only recently behaved in a loving, friendly manner toward Immaculée suddenly want to kill her. Drawing on her Catholic faith, Immaculée partly explains this extreme shift as an example of the devil "poisoning [the] hearts and minds" of people. Indeed, she gives examples of when the devil infiltrated her own mind, showing how easy it is to succumb to doubt, cynicism, and cruelty. At the same time, Immaculée also points to other factors that compel Hutus to join in the killings. She notes that soldiers would distribute drugs and alcohol to Hutus to help them become uninhibited and disconnected from reality, consequently making it easier for them to kill. In addition, she explains that Hutus who did not show a sufficient amount of aggression toward Tutsis were treated with suspicion and were sometimes killed themselves. To show mercy to Tutsis—let alone hide them in one's house as Pastor Murinzi does—essentially amounted to a self-imposed death sentence. Under such desperate conditions, it is perhaps unsurprising that so many Hutus joined in with the killing. The book shows that prejudice is built on fear, and that an escalation in fear therefore leads to an intensification of prejudice, hatred, and violence.

Yet while love and tolerance can turn into hatred with frightening speed, Immaculée herself demonstrates that the opposite is also true. While in the bathroom, she at first struggles to forgive and love the killers. However, after intensive prayer, she remembers that the killers are also God's children, and that they are not fundamentally evil, even if they are committing evil acts. From this moment on, she feels love for the killers, thereby countering love with hate. Immaculée makes clear that fighting love with prejudice does not guarantee survival; indeed, it often has the opposite effect. For example, her father, Leonard, maintains a trusting and open heart, and this is part of what leads to his death at the hands of an old friend. Yet Immaculée believes that Leonard will go to heaven, whereas those who refuse to choose love over prejudice will be judged by God. In this sense, she has a guarantee that love will prevail, because God is love and rewards love.

FORGIVENESS AND REDEMPTION

Left to Tell is a story about choosing forgiveness under the most extreme of circumstances. The crimes of the people who massacred Immaculée's family and up to a million other Rwandans during the genocide are among the worst that can be committed, and yet Immaculée insists that they can be redeemed and must be forgiven. By foregrounding the difficulty she experienced in forgiving the killers, Immaculée emphasizes that forgiveness is not simple or easy. However, the memoir suggests that forgiveness is the only viable solution to prejudice and violence, since without forgiveness, the cycle of hatred and destruction will simply keep going. For Immaculée, forgiveness is not only a responsibility but a blessing. By forgiving the killers, she achieves a peace of mind that she would never have been able to access if she had not chosen to forgive. In bestowing forgiveness, Immaculée feels that she becomes closer to God, and in this sense, the act of forgiveness "redeems" both the victim and the perpetrator.

As a Christian, Immaculée was brought up to believe in the importance of mercy and forgiveness. One of the core beliefs in

Christianity is that any sinner who seeks forgiveness from God is redeemable. For this reason, Jesus is often referred to as "the Redeemer"; through Him, Christians believe they can achieve redemption and salvation. Yet while Immaculée has always believed in the power of forgiveness and redemption, the genocide puts these beliefs to the test in a way she never could have imagined. It is one thing to forgive someone who has wronged you in a minor way, but to forgive people who have killed your whole family is quite a different matter. Immaculée explains that even though she knows that her religion compels her to forgive the killers, she struggles to actually do so. This struggle makes her doubtful and confused about God's plan for her life, which distances her from Him. While she is in hiding in Pastor Murinzi's bathroom, she prays for all sinners but cannot bring herself to pray for the killers. She explains, "That was a problem for me because I knew that God expected us to pray for everyone, and more than anything, I wanted God on my side." As this passage illustrates, during the genocide Immaculée struggles to put certain aspects of her faith into practice, even as she spends almost all of her waking hours deep in prayer. This creates a barrier between her and God precisely when she needs Him the most.

Despite the difficulties Immaculée faces, she is eventually able to forgive the killers, a process that becomes the basis for the most important lesson of the book. Part of what allows Immaculée to forgive the killers is the acknowledgment that she, like everyone else, is a sinner. The universality of sin is one of the main tenets of Christian doctrine, and it allows Immaculée to recognize kinship and similarity with people who, on the surface, could not be more different from her: while Immaculée is kind, humble, disciplined, and intelligent, the killers are bloodthirsty, destructive, and filled with hate. Yet through remembering that every person is a sinner, Immaculée is able to realize that there *is* a connection between herself and the killers—a realization that overwhelms her resentment and allows her to forgive those who killed her family. Immaculée knows that her own sin will only be washed away if she is able to forgive other people for their wrongs. Forgiveness thus stimulates a positive cycle of grace and is a way for mortal humans to implement God's will in the world.

Immaculée is able to forgive because she remembers that the capacity to forgive is a gift from God. While at times she feels that the responsibility to forgive the killers is an unjust and insufferable burden, over the course of the book she is able to remind herself that, in fact, her ability to forgive is a blessing. Rather than being an insult to her family's memory, Immaculée sees forgiving their killers as a way to honor her family. Furthermore, forgiveness also gives Immaculée a feeling of peace and joy that had been almost totally robbed from her during the genocide. For Immaculée, forgiveness is a form of salvation because it brings her closer to God and to the memory of her family, allowing her to turn a horrific event into an opportunity to strengthen her faith and bring more love into the world.

GOOD VS. EVIL

Immaculée's story shows how good and evil exist side-by-side, often in a remarkably extreme fashion. Immaculée's family—and particularly her parents—are a model of kindness and justice. Her father, Leonard, is a pillar of the community who is always helping others, and her mother, Rose, is similarly committed to helping those in need. Yet alongside this immense goodness lies the evil of prejudice, hatred, and violence—an evil which eventually ends up killing Leonard, Rose, and almost all of Immaculée's other family members. By juxtaposing good and evil in this way, Immaculée indicates that good and evil are not abstract concepts or remote issues. Rather, the choice between good and evil is one people must make every day, in every decision they make, however minor. Moreover, given that good and evil are woven into the fabric of everyday life, the book suggests that it is frighteningly easy to do evil—as demonstrated by the fact that perfectly ordinary people end up viciously committing murder during the genocide. At the same time, Immaculée's own experience shows that goodness is just as much a part of everyday life as evil, and that it is always possible to choose to do good—even under the most horrific conditions.

Immaculée's story makes it clear that she is someone who has always been compelled to do good. Guided by her religion, her family, and her natural instinct for justice, Immaculée has rarely been tempted to commit evil. Despite this, Immaculée acknowledges that, like all people, she has at times been led astray by the voice of the devil. While she is hiding in Pastor Murinzi's bathroom and praying to be spared by the killers, she hears the devil mocking her for believing that she could be saved. In this moment, she is tempted to give into cynicism and stop praying. However, she manages to ignore the devil's voice and is ultimately spared. This incident highlights that for Immaculée, good and evil are almost synonymous with faith and lack of faith. She implies that with faith and devotion to strengthen one's sense of right and wrong, it is far easier to do good and avoid doing evil. As soon as one gives in to cynicism and doubt, evil becomes a much more immediate possibility.

Again, by highlighting her own struggle between good and evil, Immaculée stresses her similarity to other people. There is nothing within her that makes her inherently more likely to commit good than other people, and indeed, avoiding evil is a lifelong effort. Immaculée emphasizes that she can never become complacent and take her own goodness for granted: "The struggle between my prayers and the evil whispers that I was sure belonged to the devil raged in my mind. I never stopped praying […]and the whispering never relented." The choice between good and evil is thus presented as one which every person must make continually—sometimes at every

moment of the day.

Immaculée's belief that choosing between good and evil is a never-ending part of mortal existence helps her to forgive her family's killers. If everyone is constantly forced to choose between good and evil, this means that even those who have committed the most horrific acts of evil still have a chance to repent, reform themselves, and choose to do good. Immaculée's ardent faith in every person's capacity for good gives her the strength to forgive and to rebuild her life after the genocide.

EDUCATION, DISCIPLINE, AND GROWTH

In Immaculée's family, education is extremely important. Both her parents are teachers and encourage their children to be extremely diligent in their studies, providing the children with extra instruction and supervision on their homework. Immaculée is an ambitious, intelligent, and disciplined young woman, and she excels academically. This opens up opportunities for her to attend the very best educational institutions in Rwanda, experience independence at a young age, and lay the foundations for an impressive career. Yet despite Immaculée's own hard work and talent, her education is blighted by both institutional and informal prejudice and discrimination against Tutsis. Over the course of the book, she learns that while education may be affected by ignorance and hatred, it is also one of the best solutions to the problem of prejudice and can help people to survive in extremely difficult situations. While Immaculée's primary focus in the book is the power of love, faith, and forgiveness to get people through the most difficult of times, education and discipline are also shown to have a transformative impact on individuals and society, and to be beacons of hope for a better world.

In some ways, Immaculée presents her educational success as natural and easy. She always loved studying, and was eager to obey her parents' wishes for her to be a star student. Indeed, just as Immaculée always had a natural enthusiasm for religion, so, too, did she wholeheartedly embrace education. As a result, when she is fifteen years old, Immaculée finishes the eighth grade with an average grade of 94%, which she notes is "more than enough to ensure a scholarship and placement in one of the best public high schools in the region." At this age, she dreams of attending university and being a pilot, a professor, or a psychologist. Although she is only from a small village, her discipline and educational success indicate that she will be able to achieve anything she puts her mind to. Indeed, Immaculée is eventually accepted into the Lycée de Notre Dame d'Afrique, one of the best schools in the country, and into the National University in Butare, where she is awarded a scholarship. At every turn, Immaculée achieves more and more academic honors and thus, from a certain perspective, her educational success looks rather easy.

Despite her own hard work, Immaculée's education is marred by prejudice and discrimination. As early as elementary school, one of her teachers, Buhoro, makes the students identify themselves by their ethnicity and scolds Immaculée when she admits that she doesn't know whether she is Tutsi or Hutu. Later, when Immaculée is accepted to the Lycée, she does not receive the scholarship to which her grades entitle her because she is Tutsi. Finally, the genocide itself begins when Immaculée is on Easter break from college. When she eventually returns to Butare after the genocide ends, she finds the university destroyed. Prejudice and violence thus cast a shadow over Immaculée's entire educational career. Even as her own talent, hard work, and discipline propel her to academic success, Immaculée cannot escape the impact of prejudice, which blights her educational journey.

Despite the destructive impact of prejudice, however, education ultimately helps Immaculée to survive the genocide and to rebuild her life in its aftermath. Perhaps the most pertinent example of this comes with Immaculée's decision to teach herself English while she is confined to Pastor Murinzi's bathroom. She realizes that many of the Tutsi rebels who are fighting their way through the country have been living in Uganda, and that they therefore speak English. She realizes that if the rebels succeed in defeating the government, speaking English will help her to get a good job, and she even has a vision of herself working at the UN. Immaculée's extraordinary talent and discipline allow her to teach herself English in the bathroom using only the Bible and a dictionary. As predicted, this helps her to build a successful life after the genocide and even realize her dream of working at the UN.

Through her discipline and dedication to education, Immaculée is able to keep learning even in the most difficult situation imaginable, hiding for her life in the midst of a genocide. This remarkable fact emphasizes that, with discipline and determination, education and growth are always possible. In this way, the book presents knowledge and self-betterment as sources of hope—beacons of light in the darkness of ignorance.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE ROSARY

The Rosary is a set of prayers Catholics recite, and the term also refers to the string of beads and crucifix held while reciting these prayers. Throughout *Left to Tell*, the Rosary symbolizes Immaculée's commitment to her Catholic faith and her family. As Immaculée reiterates throughout the book, she credits her survival of the genocide to her faith in God and to the Roman Catholic teachings with which she was brought up. Even when the world is crumbling

around her, Immaculée finds peace through her Rosary. It reminds her of the most familiar, constant, and fundamental parts of her life: God, her religion, and her family. Indeed, one particular Rosary is especially significant in the book—the Rosary that Leonard gives Immaculée just as the genocide is beginning. Throughout her time hiding in Pastor Murinzi's bathroom, Immaculée clutches this Rosary, and it reminds her that even though she is trapped in a room full of strangers, she is never really alone. God is always with her, and, in a spiritual sense, so is her father and the rest of her family—even after they perish.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Hay House edition of *Left to Tell* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Both of my parents were teachers, and adamant believers that the only defense against poverty and hunger was a good education… Mom and Dad were the first high school graduates in their families, and they were determined that their children would go even further than they had in school. Dad led by example, working hard and studying throughout his life. He received many honors and promotions during his career, rising steadily through the ranks from primary teacher to junior high school principal. He was eventually appointed chief administrator for all of the Catholic schools in our district.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker), Leonard Ukulikiyinkindi, Marie Rose Kankindi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Immaculée has introduced the Rwanda of her childhood, which she refers to as a "paradise." She explains that she was born into a loving, supportive family, and in this passage she describes how her parents overcame poverty through education. This led both of them to value education enormously, and to encourage their children to work hard in school in order to secure a prosperous future. Immaculée's parents story also constitutes a narrative of hope against the issues of poverty and discrimination plaguing Rwanda. While social inequality makes life difficult for many members of the population, Immaculée's parents' example suggests that it is possible for society to change in a positive manner.

My parents were devout Roman Catholics and passed on their beliefs to us. Mass was mandatory on Sundays, as were evening prayers with the family at home. I loved praying, going to church, and everything else to do with God. I especially loved the Virgin Mary, believing that she was my second mom, watching out for me from heaven.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker), Leonard Ukulikiyinkindi, Marie Rose Kankindi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Immaculée explains that she inherited her Catholic beliefs from her parents, but developed an enthusiasm for religion on her own accord from an early age. Religious belief comes naturally to Immaculée, and even as a young child she eagerly delights in it. For some children, prayer and church is akin to a chore that they endure because they are compelled to—in contrast, faith inspires happiness in Immaculée.

Her relationship with the Virgin Mary is one of the reasons why she is particularly devoted to Catholicism, though at other moments in the novel she indirectly expresses support for religious pluralism. Immaculée's description of her love for the Virgin Mary also highlights how faith and family are deeply connected in her mind. Immaculée feels that she has two mothers, one on Earth and one in heaven. This belief possibly helps Immaculée cope when Rose is killed and she has to adjust to having two "mothers" in heaven.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ But our parents didn't teach us about our own history. We didn't know that Rwanda was made up of three tribes: a Hutu majority; a Tutsi minority; and a very small number of Twa, a pygmy-like tribe of forest dwellers. We weren't taught that the German colonialists, and the Belgian ones that followed, converted Rwanda's existing social structure—a monarchy that under a Tutsi king had provided Rwanda with centuries of peace and harmony—into a discriminatory, race-based class system. The Belgians favored the minority Tutsi aristocracy and promoted its status as the ruling class; therefore, Tutsis were ensured a better education to better manage the country and generate greater profits for the Belgian overlords. The Belgians introduced an ethnic identity card to more easily distinguish the two tribes, deepening the rift they'd created between Hutu and Tutsi. Those reckless blunders created a lingering resentment among Hutus that helped lay the groundwork for genocide.

Related Characters: Leonard Ukulikiyinkindi, Marie Rose Kankindi , Immaculée Ilibagiza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14-15

Explanation and Analysis

Immaculée has explained that she never heard the words "Tutsi" or "Hutu" until she was in elementary school when one day her teacher, Buhoro, did an "ethnic roll call" wherein he asked students to identify themselves by tribe. Immaculée didn't know which tribe she was and therefore didn't stand up; she was humiliated when her teacher, Buhoro, scolded her for her ignorance. Here Immaculée explains that despite her parents' otherwise rigorous commitment to education, they failed to teach their children about the ethnic divide in Rwanda, which was an enormous part of Rwandan history.

Immaculée's summary of the tribal divide illustrates how the divide was not created by colonizers, but that it became a big problem as a result of colonial influence. She also shows that the advantages conferred onto the Tutsi elite eventually became the grounds for discrimination (and, ultimately, genocide). The colonizers' unjustified authority and control of wealth meant that they manipulated society in a way that far outlasted the colonial era. Indeed, while Immaculée does not place the blame for the genocide entirely on colonialism, she firmly identifies the link between colonialism and the ethnic chaos that followed.

❝ Mom and Dad ignored the social and political reality they lived in, and instead taught that everyone was born equal. They didn't want their children growing up feeling paranoid or inferior because they were born Tutsi.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker), Leonard Ukulikiyinkindi, Marie Rose Kankindi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Immaculée has explained that her parents already lived through two massacres against Tutsis, but that they never told her about these. She believes that they did so because they wanted to shield their children from the problems of prejudice, discrimination, and hatred. Yet, in this passage, Immaculée subtly conveys a note of disapproval and regret over her parents' decision to "ignore the social and political reality they lived in." While she admires her parents' dedication to equality and appreciates their love and protectiveness, in hindsight she realizes that they were naïve to completely "ignore" the problems surrounding tribal identity. Indeed, their hope and naivete left them vulnerable to hatred, discrimination, and, ultimately, death.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Hundreds of thousands of Tutsis had fled Rwanda during the troubles of 1959 and 1973, as well as the many other times that Hutu extremists had gone on Tutsi killing sprees. They'd gone into exile to save their lives and those of their families. Mr. Gahigi called the rebels "foreigners" because most of them grew up in neighboring countries such as Uganda and Zaire—but that was only because President Habyarimana enforced a policy banning exiles from ever returning to Rwanda. He'd created a Tutsi diaspora, and entire generations of Rwandan Tutsis had grown up without once setting foot in their homeland.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker), President Juvénal Habyarimana, Mr. Gagihi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

In Immaculée's final year at Lycée, civil war breaks out in Rwanda. She is informed of this by her teacher Mr. Gahigi, who presents the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), an

organization of Tutsi rebels, in a negative light. In this passage, Immaculée balances out Mr. Gahigi's portrayal of the conflict in order to make it more accurate. She explains that while the Hutu government characterized the Tutsi rebels as outsiders, they had been *driven* out of their home country by anti-Tutsi discrimination and violence. It advantaged the government to pretend that the Tutsis were an aggressive foreign force, but in fact the RPF's stated aim was to fight against the oppression of Tutsis and make Rwanda more equal.

Immaculée's words here show how the conditions for genocide were fostered in tragically deliberate ways. Both sides in the war created a violent conflict that ended up spilling into civilian life when ordinary Tutsi citizens were massacred. Meanwhile, President Habyarimana and other Hutu politicians stoked the tensions between Tutsis and Hutus and encouraged anti-Tutsi sentiment. Their characterization of Tutsis as foreign invaders legitimized the desire to expel Tutsis from their own communities and, ultimately, to eradicate them from Rwanda.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ As I said, if these killers are driven only by hatred, we will force them away. But if the government is sending them, if these attacks are part of an organized plan to exterminate Tutsis, we are in serious trouble. The government has guns and grenades—it has an army and a militia—and we have no weapons at all. If the government plans to kill us, all we can do is pray. Let us use the time we have to repent. Let us pray for God to forgive our sins. If we are to die, let us die with our hearts clean... It doesn't matter if we live or die—the important thing is that we fight against this evil that has come to our homes!

Related Characters: Leonard Ukulikiyinkindi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50-51

Explanation and Analysis

Although Immaculée and her family don't realize it at the time, the genocide has begun. Before long, a massive group of Tutsis assembles outside their family home, seeking advice and guidance from Leonard. Although everything is chaotic and uncertain, Leonard addresses the crowd in a commanding manner. He at first seems confident that love will conquer hatred, but then admits that if the government is supporting the massacre of Tutsis, it is likely the will die. It is clear that Leonard does not fear death. As a deeply religious man, he believes that standing up for justice, repenting for sin, and loving God are far more important than whether or not he lives or dies.

This passage is significant because, later in the book, Immaculée implies that Leonard was naïve in trusting the government and that this is part of why he ended up being killed in the very early stages of the genocide. While this may be true, this passage demonstrates that Leonard never necessarily trusted the government—or at least, that he chose to trust them without wholly believing that the government would defend Tutsis from massacres. Indeed, Leonard *chose* to trust and maintain an open, "clean" heart because he believed this was far more important than preserving his own life.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ My brother, my soul mate, put his hands in mine, and they felt soft and light as feathers. No matter how hard I squeezed them, I couldn't feel the weight of his palms against mine—it was like holding the hands of a disappearing soul. My heart felt like it was exploding.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Leonard has insisted that Immaculée go to stay with Pastor Murinzi, a local Hutu. Immaculée at first insists on staying with her family, but eventually she agrees to stay with the pastor. Damascene decides to stay with a Hutu friend, and in this passage Immaculée describes the moment at which she says goodbye to him. It is the last time they will ever see each other and though they do not know this at the time, Immaculée's description of their parting suggests that on some level, they both suspected it might be true. Indeed, her words imply that Damascene is a kind of "dead man walking"—someone turned ghostlike by their own imminent death. Damascene's spectral presence is indicative of a broader way in which, at the beginning of the genocide, Immaculée's world is starting to fall apart.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ We sat in an uncomfortable heap, too afraid to adjust our positions or to even breathe too heavily. We waited for the gray light of dawn to fill the room, then carefully pried ourselves apart to take turns standing and stretching. A two- or three-minute break was all we allowed ourselves before resuming our awkward positions on the floor.

When morning broke, the birds in the pastor's shade tree began singing. I was jealous of them, thinking, *How lucky you are to have been born birds and have freedom—after all, look at what we humans are doing to ourselves.*

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Because the killers have started searching everyone's houses looking for Tutsis, Pastor Murinzi has been forced to hide Immaculée and the other Tutsi women and girls he is sheltering in his own en suite bathroom. Nobody else in Pastor Murinzi's family can know that he is hiding the women, because it would put the lives of everyone in the house at risk. As a result, the women are prevented from making any noise. Furthermore, the bathroom is so small that they must all remain in sitting positions all day and night, with only extremely brief and infrequent breaks for stretching.

In this passage, Immaculée points out the heartbreaking contrast between the conditions in the bathroom and the birds flying freely above. Her parallel points to the completely unnatural and senseless nature of prejudice, war, and genocide. Although some level of conflict is part of nature, none of these issues exist in the natural world. For Immaculée, the harmony of nature reflects God's plan, whereas cruelty and evil are the work of human sin and the devil. Immaculée's desire to be a bird is less a literal fantasy and more a wish to return to God's vision for a harmonious, peaceful existence.

❝ The struggle between my prayers and the evil whispers that I was sure belonged to the devil raged in my mind. I never stopped praying… and the whispering never relented.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Immaculée has witnessed a mob of killers consisting of her friends and neighbors storm through Mataba. They search for her and other Tutsis, and Immaculée prays desperately for God to protect her. While she is praying, she hears the voice of the devil insulting her and making her doubt God. Immaculée is disturbed, but keeps praying with resolute determination. In this quotation, she explains that despite her deep religious convictions, the voice of the devil never completely leaves her mind. This shows that faith is an ongoing "struggle" and that doubt can never be conquered for good. Rather, it must be fought every day, particularly in challenging situations. Yet by resisting doubt and choosing faith even more passionately, Immaculée ultimately enhances her relationship with God.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ I knew that he wasn't entirely to blame for his ignorance because he'd learned his contempt for Tutsis in school . . . the same school I went to! Young Hutus were taught from an early age that Tutsis were inferior and not to be trusted, and they didn't belong in Rwanda. Hutus witnessed the segregation of Tutsis every day, first in the schoolyard and then in the workplace, and they were taught to dehumanize us by calling us "snakes" and "cockroaches." No wonder it was so easy for them to kill us—snakes were to be killed and cockroaches exterminated!

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker), Sembeba

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85-86

Explanation and Analysis

Immaculée and the other women in the bathroom overhear a conversation between Pastor Murinzi and his son, Sembeba, in which Sembeba expresses support for the massacre of Tutsis—despite the fact that his own mother was Tutsi. Immaculée is infuriated, but in this passage she reflects that Sembeba is not entirely to blame, because he was taught to hate Tutsis through propaganda and even through school. She illustrates how terms like "snakes" and "cockroaches," which on one level could be considered little more than silly insults, were in fact part of a sinister plot to dehumanize Tutsis. Once people are robbed of their

humanity, they can be killed more easily. While Immaculée does not totally blame Sembeba for buying into the propaganda that encourages him to see Tutsis as animals, her comment that they went to the same school indicates that prejudice is never inevitable, and that people have a responsibility to resist it and treat everyone with love and respect.

It was past noon, and I'd been praying the rosary since dawn for God to give His love and forgiveness to all the sinners in the world. But try as I might, I couldn't bring myself to pray for the killers. That was a problem for me because I knew that God expected us to pray for everyone, and more than anything, I wanted God on my side.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

Pastor Murinzi has described horrifying scenes from the world outside, telling the women that they might be the only Tutsis left alive in the country. Immaculée explains that she is now about to tell the story of when the killers came to the pastor's house for the second time. They arrive at a point when she is deep in prayer, though her prayers are disturbed by the fact that she cannot bring herself to pray for the forgiveness of the killers.

Even though Immaculée knows abstractly that no one is free from sin and that it is therefore vital to pray for everyone's forgiveness, she cannot make herself do it. It is so difficult to pray for the killers that she knowingly defies God's will, even at a time when she needs Him most. This passage therefore exemplifies another way in which faith is an ongoing struggle for Immaculée. It may bring her great comfort and hope, but it can also be enormously difficult, challenging her in ways she doesn't think she can bear.

Chapter 14 Quotes

I took a deep breath and thanked God for answering my prayers and bringing me the tools I needed to learn English. Even though I'd be losing prayer time, I knew that God would be with me while I studied. He intended for me to learn this language, and I could feel the power of His intention coursing through me. I would not waste a minute of my time in self-pity or doubt. God had presented me with a gift and my gift in return would be to make the most of His kindness.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Immaculée has decided to teach herself English in the bathroom, reasoning that it will help her communicate with English-speaking Tutsis after the genocide. She even has a vision of using her new language skills to get a job at the UN. She asks Pastor Murinzi for any English books he has, along with a French-English dictionary. In this passage, she expresses her gratitude to God for giving her the idea and tools to learn a new language. Although it will take a massive effort to teach herself English—particularly given the terrible conditions inside the bathroom and the turmoil of the world outside—Immaculée feels that the opportunity to teach herself English is a manifestation of God's kindness.

This passage thus demonstrates that Immaculée's ability to work hard and remain determined under extremely difficult circumstances is the result of her faith, gratitude, and love for God. Her ability to find blessings from God in even the most dire situations in turn stimulates her faith and resilience.

I knew that whatever I envisioned would come to pass if I had faith and visualized it with a pure heart and good intentions, and if it were something God thought was right for me. It was then that I realized I could dream and

visualize my destiny. I vowed that I'd always dare to dream for what I wanted. And I would only dream for beautiful things like love, health, and peace, because that is the kind of beauty God wants for all His children.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Immaculée's early success in learning English makes her even more grateful for the opportunity to set her mind to this task. It also reveals to her the power of positive visualization. She understands that if she imagines something hard enough, that thing will come true—as long as it is something God believes is right for her. This helps explain how Immaculée believes that her own agency and God's plan intersect. She knows that her fate is ultimately in God's hands, but also believes that she can help influence her own her life and point it in a positive direction through her relationship with God. She finds this incredibly empowering, all the more so because she is in a situation of such utter powerlessness—trapped in the bathroom while all around her, her country is torn apart.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ Damascene managed to get to his feet one more time, and then he smiled at the killers. His fearlessness confused them—they'd murdered many Tutsis and always enjoyed listening to their victims plead for their lives. Damascene's composure robbed them of that pleasure. Instead of negotiating or begging for mercy, he challenged them to kill him. "Go ahead," he said. "What are you waiting for? Today is my day to go to God. I can feel Him all around us. He is watching, waiting to take me home. Go ahead—finish your work and send me

to paradise. I pity you for killing people like it's some kind of child's game. Murder is no game: If you offend God, you will pay for your fun. The blood of the innocent people you cut down will follow you to your reckoning. But I am praying for you . . . I pray that you see the evil you're doing and ask for Cod's forgiveness before it's too late."

Related Characters: Damascene, Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

In the French camp, Immaculée has reunited with her friend Jean Paul, who has told her the horrifying stories of how each of her family members were killed. He tells her the story of what happened to Damascene last, and at first Immaculée is too upset to listen. However, she eventually learns from Jean Paul that Damascene faced his murderers with courage and dignity. Immaculée reconstructs the scene based on Jean Paul's report, emphasizing Damascene's acceptance of death and remarkable courage. Like his sister, Damascene does not fear death because he sees it as time to return to God. This encourages him to stand up to his killers rather than cower and beg for mercy.

For Immaculée and her brother, Christianity does not only encourage meekness, love, and forgiveness, but also dignity and righteousness. Furthermore, Damascene does not need to express anger because he knows that justice will ultimately be delivered by God. Like Immaculée, he understands the importance of forgiveness even in situations of unimaginable horror. As a result, he dies with great dignity, moral integrity, and honor.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ I prayed that God would touch the captain's heart with His forgiveness, and I prayed again for the killers to put down their machetes and beg for God's mercy. The captain's anger made me think that the cycle of hatred and mistrust in Rwanda would not easily be broken. There would certainly be even more bitterness after the killing stopped, bitterness that could easily erupt into more violence. Only God's Divine forgiveness could stop that from happening now. I could see that whatever path God put me on, helping others to forgive would be a big part of my life's work.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker), The Captain

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

Immaculée spends a lot of time talking to the captain of the French camp, and at one point, he offers to kill any Hutus she wants to see dead. Immaculée is shocked and tells the captain that she wouldn't want that—although the killers have strayed from God's light, they are not evil, and she believes in forgiveness, not revenge. This conversation disturbs Immaculée, as she realizes that the problem is far greater than the captain as an individual. After the genocide, Tutsis will hate Hutus for their actions—the tensions between the tribes will remain, and the cycle of prejudice and violence could go on forever.

Immaculée firmly believes in forgiveness not only because it is a mandate from God, but also because it is the only way to

interrupt cycles of hatred. While it may not feel like a practical solution to those struggling to overcome their own pain and resentment, forgiveness is actually deeply practical, offering solutions that cannot be provided by any other means.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ The beautiful campus where I'd formed so many wonderful memories and loving friendships was no more. There was garbage everywhere, and many of the buildings were charred and crumbling. Student records blew across the campus like tumbleweeds, and after all these weeks, there were still so many bodies on the ground. I couldn't bear to look, fearing that I'd see the corpse of Sarah or one of my other dear girlfriends. I tried to conjure the memory of the school dances I'd enjoyed, the plays I'd performed in, the romantic walks I'd taken with John . . . but all were obliterated by the devastation I saw before me.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker), John, Sarah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

Realizing that she will need her student records if she is going to be able to get a job, Immaculée has returned to the National University in Butare, where she spent her happy student days. The campus has been completely destroyed, to the point that Immaculée hardly recognizes it. Indeed, the place is so different from her original happy memories that Immaculée is no longer even able to access those memories. This shows how the genocide destroyed not only Immaculée's world, but her image of that world—an added trauma.

What is so particularly heartbreaking about her description of the university is the fact that her times there were so happy. Universities are places dedicated to education, filled with the joy, excitement, and promise of young people. Because of the genocide, this joy and promise has been eradicated. Many talented young people were killed, and those who remain face an uncertain, painful, and chaotic future.

Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ I wept at the sight of his suffering. Felicien had let the devil enter his heart, and the evil had ruined his life like a cancer in his soul. He was now the victim of his victims, destined to live in torment and regret. I was overwhelmed with pity for the man.

Related Characters: Immaculée Ilibagiza (speaker), Felicien

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

Having buried Rose and Damascene, Immaculée makes another trip back to Mataba, this time to visit the leader of the pack of killers who murdered her mother and brother. The man, Felicien, was formerly a successful Hutu businessman whom Immaculée had always thought of as handsome and charming. When she sees him in the prison cell, he is clearly destroyed by what he has done—he cannot meet her gaze, his face is sallow, and he is wearing tattered clothing.

Immaculée previously worried about being able to forgive the killers, but in this moment sympathy and forgiveness come naturally to her. She feels genuine sorrow at the sight of his suffering. She can also see that Felicien has become "the victim of his victims"—not because he has been persecuted in revenge or even necessarily because he is imprisoned, but rather because he has to live with his horrific crimes. He is tortured by what he did to his victims, and as a result Immaculée feels no need to inflict further suffering on him. Instead, feeling pity for him, she can forgive him and pray that God does too.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

In the preface, Immaculée Ilibagiza writes that the following book is not meant to be a comprehensive or objective history of the Rwandan genocide, but rather a highly personal narrative. It is a true story, and she uses her own name and the names of her family. However, she changed others' names to protect their safety. Immaculée concludes by saying that she hopes readers "benefit" from her story.

The preface establishes that while "Left to Tell" is a nonfiction book that tells a true story, it is also a subjective, personal narrative. Immaculée hopes to teach and benefit others not necessarily through "hard" facts, but through her own emotional and spiritual journey.

INTRODUCTION: MY NAME IS IMMACULÉE

Immaculée hears the killers shouting her name, saying they know she's there somewhere. These killers are her former friends and neighbors. One of them says he has killed 399 "cockroaches" and wants to make it 400. Immaculée is crouched inside a "secret bathroom." She is terrified, and wonders if her family members are dead or alive. Immaculée prays, and the killers move on to the next house. She is relieved, but will soon come to realize that while God has "spared" her, she hasn't been "saved." What follows is her story of finding God amongst one of the worst genocides in history.

Rather than starting her story at the beginning, Immaculée begins in the middle, during one of the most horrific and terrifying moments of her life. This climactic introduction establishes that the story to come is not, on the surface, a happy one. However, as Immaculée makes clear, in the midst of the horror there is a positive and redemptive element to the story, rooted in her relationship with God.

CHAPTER 1: THE ETERNAL SPRING

Immaculée thinks of her birthplace as "paradise." Rwanda's natural landscape and climate are so beautiful that German colonizers called it "the land of eternal spring." As a child, Immaculée is surrounded by love and doesn't know that racism or prejudice exist. She doesn't hear the words Tutsi or Hutu until starting school. Immaculée's village, Mataba, is extremely safe, and she has a very happy childhood. Mataba is in Kibuye, a province in western Rwanda. Immaculée has fond memories of going swimming with her father, Leonard, near their house. When they get home, her mother, Rose, always has breakfast ready.

Immaculée's description of her childhood in Mataba recalls the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden. Eden is a peaceful, bountiful, and uncorrupted landscape that is destroyed by Adam and Eve's original sin. In a similar sense, the beautiful and calm land of Rwanda will be spoiled by the evil of the genocide.

Rose is a very energetic woman, who tends to the family fields alongside her full-time job as a primary school teacher. Leonard is a teacher too, and both parents emphasize the importance of education to their children. Like his wife, Leonard was the first person in his family to graduate high school, but through hard work he was eventually appointed chief administrator for all the Catholic schools in the district. Leonard and Rose met in 1963 while travelling to the wedding of a mutual friend and married soon after.

Immaculée's parents serve as examples of the transformative power of love, faith, and education. Neither grew up with much privilege or opportunity, yet through hard work, kindness, and religious devotion, they build an exemplary life filled with happiness and service to others.

Immaculée's family home is considered "luxurious" within her village, and the family has two cars, which is "practically unheard of in our part of Rwanda." They also have a motorcycle. People in the village nickname Leonard "Muzungu," which means both "rich person" and "white man." Immaculée's family are Catholic, and like the rest of her family Immaculée is deeply religious. She loves praying and going to church, and especially loves the Virgin Mary. At age ten, she visits a priest named Father Clement along with her friend Jeanette. The girls tell him they have decided to become nuns. Father Clement blesses them and tells them to come back when they are 18.

Religious faith has always come easily to Immaculée. Her desire to be a nun shows that, even as a child, she had a deep connection with God and a desire to place religion at the center of her life. At the same time, it is clear that at this point, nothing has seriously challenged Immaculée's faith. Growing up in a family that was both devoutly religious and blessed with prosperity meant that her relationship with religion was natural and easy.

Immaculée explains that her parents are "Christians in the broadest sense": they treat everyone kindly and spend their free time doing volunteer work. Leonard established a coffee cooperative that serves as a scholarship fund for poor children, and he eventually raises enough money to build a community center, a soccer pitch, and new roof for the school. Rose, meanwhile, often invites families in need to live in her own home. She also tutors students for free and sews uniforms for local children. She once used her own money to buy fabric to make a wedding dress for the daughter of a woman too poor to buy one herself.

Both Leonard and Rose are exemplary Christians, parents, and neighbors. They clearly find joy in dedicating their time and effort to helping those in need. As a result, serving others is not something Immaculée is brought up to see as a chore, but rather a source of happiness. Again, this makes leading a good, Christian life come easily to her.

Rose and Leonard treat the village like an "extended family" and people travel significant distances to seek Leonard's advice. People turn to Rose for advice, too, and because she has taught so many of the villagers, most of them still call her "Teacher." Sometimes when Leonard comes home from drinking with friends, he wakes the children so they can sit and eat together. They then pray together before going back to sleep. Immaculée thinks of these evenings as "magical."

Not only are Rose and Leonard schoolteachers, but they also serve as "teachers" in a broader sense, since they are pillars in the community to whom others turn for advice. This passage thus illustrates the different ways in which teaching and learning take place. Sometimes they occur in a traditional classroom environment, but at other times education is a more spiritual, informal practice.

Immaculée has three brothers. The oldest, Aimable, was born in 1965 and is wise beyond his years. When Aimable goes to boarding school at age 12, Immaculée writes him a letter that just says "I love you" and "I miss you" over and over. Immaculée's next brother, Damascene, is two years younger than Aimable. Damascene is charismatic, intelligent, and funny. Once, having taught himself to drive at the age of 12, Damascene drives Rose to the hospital when she has an asthma attack while Leonard is away. Damascene almost crashes the car, but ends up saving his mother's life. Damascene is also an excellent student, and he becomes the youngest person in the region to earn a master's degree.

All of Immaculée's family members are extraordinary in one way or another, and it is clear that this is not just Immaculée's (perhaps biased) opinion. Each family member excels in both a personal and academic context, which once again reiterates how, in Immaculée's family, moral goodness and educational discipline are seen to go hand-in-hand.

The youngest member of the family is Vianney, whom Immaculée calls "lovable but pesky." Even when Vianney grew up to be a tall and handsome young man, Immaculée always thought of him as a baby. As the only girl, Immaculée faced pressure to have a "spotless reputation." Her parents were strict with her, and in society more broadly she was expected to be "seen and not heard." It is therefore ironic that she was the only member of her family left to tell their story.

This is the first moment at which readers see Immaculée encountering prejudice. As a girl, she faces challenging and unfair expectations, forced to preserve her family name through her own reputation. At the same time, Immaculée hints at how these gendered expectations will be disrupted by the extraordinary horror of the genocide.

CHAPTER 2: STANDING UP

Immaculée is 10 years old and in her elementary school classroom when her teacher, Buhoro, tells all the Hutus to stand up. He then tells the Tutsis to stand up, and after, asks Immaculée why she didn't stand for either. Immaculée admits that she doesn't know to which tribe she belongs. Furious, Buhoro sends her out of the class and tells her to only come back when she knows. Immaculée hides behind some bushes, sobbing, and waits for Damascene to get out of class. She wants to ask her best friend, Janet, who identified herself as Hutu, to explain what happened.

This is the beginning of a "paradise lost" moment in which Immaculée's childhood innocence starts to crumble. While she was raised without an understanding of the difference between Tutsis and Hutus, in the world beyond her immediate family this difference is treated as gravely important.

When Immaculée tells Damascene what happened, Damascene says that Buhoro is "not nice" but that she shouldn't worry, and should just stand up when Janet does. He suggests that they are the same as "what our friends are." Immaculée would later realize that Damascene also knew practically nothing about the ethnic divide.

Immaculée looks up to Damascene as a source of wisdom and authority. Yet when it comes to the tribal divide in Rwanda, both are blinded by their innocence and inability to comprehend prejudice.

Immaculée explains that there are three tribes in Rwanda: the majority of the population is Hutu, a minority is Tutsi, and an even smaller minority is Twa, a pygmy tribe who live in the forest. In the precolonial era, Rwanda was a peaceful monarchy run by a Tutsi king. When Belgian colonists arrived, they conferred advantages onto the Tutsi elite and mandated the use of identity cards in order to make it easier to immediately determine everyone's tribe. In the 20th century, Tutsis demanded greater independence, and as a result the Belgians supported the Hutus in violently overthrowing the Tutsi monarchy in 1959. Over 100,000 Tutsis were killed. By the time of independence in 1962, there was a Hutu government and Tutsis had become "second-class citizens."

Immaculée's account of the ethnic divide shows how preexisting issues can be stoked and distorted by the presence of colonialism. The Belgian colonizers were able to warp the relationship between Tutsis and Hutus because of their control of wealth, opportunity, and authority. Whichever tribe was favored by the colonizers had an immediate advantage over the other, and this led to resentment. Of course, this resentment was somewhat misplaced, considering that it was the colonizers themselves who were committing the greatest injustice.

Immaculée's parents made no distinction between people of different races, religions, or tribes. Yet they themselves had suffered at the hands of Hutu extremists. Although she didn't realize it at the time, Immaculée lived through the 1973 coup in which Tutsis were driven out of their homes and killed in the streets. Her family escaped to the home of a Hutu friend named Rutakamize, where they hid until the violence subsided. The family's house had been torched and Immaculée's parents had to rebuild it. Even so, they never said a bad word about Hutus and didn't teach their children about the ethnic divide in order to make sure the children never felt embarrassed about being Tutsi.

This passage establishes an important precedent of forgiveness and love. When Immaculée's parents are persecuted by Hutu extremists, they do not react with anger or vengeance—in fact, they do not even mention the injustice. Instead, they rise above prejudice and impart a worldview to their children in which ethnic divisions do not matter. This is important, as Immaculée will follow their example later in the book.

That night at dinner Immaculée tells Leonard about what happened at school. Leonard looks angry and says he will talk to Buhoro tomorrow; when Immaculée asks what tribe she is, Leonard refuses to say. After Leonard speaks to him, Buhoro is much kinder to Immaculée, gently telling her to stand when he calls out "Tutsi." Immaculée doesn't know what it means to be Tutsi, but she is happy to be one anyway—especially because there aren't many in her class, and thus she feels special.

Buhoro's change in attitude after speaking with Leonard demonstrates the respect and authority that Leonard has within the community. For now, the story of the rollcall has a happy ending, as Immaculée's childish innocence makes her happy to be Tutsi. Unfortunately, this innocence will not be able to last much longer.

Twa are very short and thus easy to recognize, but the physical distinctions between Hutus and Tutsis are more subtle. Tutsis are supposedly taller and lighter-skinned, whereas Hutus are shorter, with wide noses. However, years of intermarriage means that these distinctions have somewhat faded away. Furthermore, both tribes speak the same language (Kinyarwanda), live in the same villages, work together, attend church together, and so on.

In many ways, the division between Hutus and Tutsis is meaningless. Considering that the tribes share language, culture, religion, and even family members, the distinction between them is blurred. Believing that there is an important difference between them thus arguably requires a certain level of prejudice.

Over the course of Immaculée's childhood, the ethnic roll call in class remains the only reminder of tribalism in her life. However, this changes when she turns 15 and finishes eighth grade ranked second in her class, with an average grade of 94%. The boy ranked first is also Tutsi, and everyone else remains far behind. Immaculée's grades are enough to ensure admission and a scholarship to one of the best public high schools in the area. Immaculée is thrilled, and dreams of becoming a pilot, professor, or psychologist.

After the incident involving the roll call, Immaculée's life returns to its happy and successful state. Once again, it is made clear that educational achievement comes easy to her, and at 15 she has any number of possibilities lying at her fingertips—or so she believes.

Unbeknown to Immaculée, however, the Hutu president Juvénal Habyarimana has instituted the ethnic roll call in class in order to "balance" ethnic representation in schools and the workforce by discriminating against Tutsis. A few weeks before Immaculée is due to begin high school, a neighbor informs her family that her name wasn't on the list of scholarship recipients. Both she and the other high-achieving Tutsi boy in her class have been denied scholarships, which have all gone to Hutu students. Leonard is horrified, but eventually he assures Immaculée that they will find a way to send her to school. Rose adds that they will pray, and that Immaculée should not lose hope.

Rather than reacting to the discrimination Immaculée faces with indignation, Leonard and Rose resort to prayer, kindness, and determination. The precedent this establishes is largely positive, as it teaches Immaculée that she should not sink to the level of prejudice and resentment just because other people do so. On the other hand, Leonard and Rose's good-natured kindness has clearly left them vulnerable to being treated badly.

Nonetheless, Immaculée locks herself away and cries. A woman without a high school education has no option but to just become a "wife." The next day, Immaculée learns that Leonard sold two cows in order to send her to private school. Immaculée is stunned; cows are "status symbols" in Rwanda and selling two at once could bankrupt a family. A few weeks later, Immaculée leaves Mataba to begin her "new life" at high school.

Immaculée's family is unusual in their commitment to her education. As she has indicated, gender discrimination means that girls are less likely to be educated and they face tougher consequences when they are not educated. In the face of this unfairness, Immaculée's parents make great sacrifices in order to secure her education.

The facilities in Immaculée's new school are rather shoddy, but she is determined to excel anyway. She takes the hardest courses—math and physics—in order to prove herself to her brothers, who tease her about "women belonging in the kitchen." After two years, Immaculée is one of the top students at school. She passes the entrance exam and is accepted to the Lycée de Notre Dame d'Afrique, one of the best schools in the country. Her family are overjoyed and celebrate with a party. The only sad part of the situation is that the school is far away and difficult to access from Mataba, so Immaculée will not be able to see her parents often. Also, the area in which it is situated is "openly hostile" to Tutsis.

The happy news of Immaculée's academic success and acceptance to Lycée is blighted not only by her imminent distance from her family, but also by the reemergence of prejudice as a vague but ominous presence in Immaculée's life. Indeed, this passage foreshadows the darker times that are to come—times that are a stark contrast to the optimism and success of Immaculée's adolescence.

Immaculée adores Lycée. Unlike her previous school, the buildings are big and beautiful. There is a high security fence surrounding the campus, and Immaculée is pleased that the whole school prays together before and after meals. One of Immaculée's friends there is a Hutu girl called Sarah from Kigali. Sarah invites Immaculée home with her, and Immaculée is dazzled by the big city experience. Another of Immaculée's close friends is a beautiful Tutsi student named Clementine. They agree to look out for one another among the "unfriendly" Hutus who live beyond the school gates. The school takes measures to ensure the students' safety; students are forbidden from leaving campus without an escort.

This passage shows that, to some extent, tension between Tutsis and Hutus—and in particular, Hutu aggression toward Tutsis—has been accepted as an unfortunate fact of life in Rwanda. Immaculée's school might take precautions to protect its Tutsi students, but the issue does not seem to be a particularly major cause for concern. However, as the book will soon reveal, this turns out to be a grave error of judgment.

Immaculée receives a letter from Vianney that makes her miss him terribly. As promised, Damascene comes to visit her once a month and encourages her to pray as often as possible. After his first visit, Immaculée's girlfriends were all curious to know who the "handsome boy" who'd come to visit was.

Immaculée's close relationship with Damascene is very important. Although she loves all her family members deeply, she and Damascene have a special connection—he protects, guides, cheers, and encourages her.

CHAPTER 3: HIGHER LEARNING

In October 1990, during Immaculée's third and last year at Lycée, war begins. Immaculée's Civil Education teacher, Mr. Gagihi, arrives late to class and somberly announces that Tutsi rebels have crossed the border into Rwanda. Most of the rebels are the children of Rwandan refugees who fled to Uganda to escape persecution by Hutu extremists. Immaculée feels deeply embarrassed; she is one of only 3 Tutsis in the class, and cannot meet the eyes of the other Tutsi girls.

This passage shows the insidious and damaging nature of discrimination on the psyches of individuals. Immaculée knows there is nothing wrong with being Tutsi and that she is not personally responsible for the actions of the Tutsi rebels—however, in this moment, she nonetheless feels intense shame.

Mr. Gagihi explains that the rebels are associated with the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), who Immaculée knows want to fight to make the country more equal. Hundreds of thousands of Tutsis escaped from Rwanda between 1959-73, mostly to Uganda and Zaire. Mr. Gagihi doesn't mention this, but does say that the fighting could make life hard for Tutsis. He asks the class to pray with him for a peaceful resolution. Immaculée's shame gradually turns into anger. She resents the unjust treatment of Tutsis and prays to God to protect her family.

Throughout the book, Immaculée struggles between forgiveness and righteous anger. She knows the importance of mercy and humility, which she believes are gifts from God and manifestations of God's love on Earth. At the same time, she is understandably angry about the injustices of prejudice and discrimination—not just on her own behalf, but on behalf of her family and all other Tutsis.

The students listen to the radio, which is broadcasting propaganda about Tutsis. The announcers claim that Tutsis are cannibals with devil horns and call them "cockroaches." One of the girls in Immaculée's dorm, Danida, believes all the propaganda and one night while Immaculée is going to the bathroom, Danida starts screaming that Immaculée is an RPF soldier. One of the school's security guards holds a spear to Immaculée's head, seconds from killing her. By this point all the girls are awake and screaming in terror, while Immaculée tries to explain what happened.

While the anti-Tutsi propaganda is clearly baseless and ridiculous, it still has a powerful effect. Indeed, Danida's reaction to seeing Immaculée go to the bathroom shows how fear and propaganda cloud a person's judgment. Danida's terrified imagination overrides her reason, which—when combined with institutionalized discrimination—can have devastating consequences.

On another occasion, Immaculée is walking to a school picnic when a local Hutu man promises to kill her as vengeance for the actions of the Tutsi rebels. The next day, Clementine takes Immaculée to a room in a utility building and shows her a box containing 1,500 volts of electricity. Clementine explains that if the school is invaded by Hutu extremists, they should run to the box and electrocute themselves in order to escape being raped, tortured, and gruesomely murdered. Immaculée finds it surreal to make such an agreement at the age of 20, but nonetheless she agrees.

This passage illustrates the dark shadow cast over Immaculée's life by the actions of Hutu extremists. At 20, she should be optimistic and carefree, full of excitement for her future. Instead, she has to plan for the possibility of committing suicide in order to save herself from a fate even worse than death by electrocution.

The students try to gain news from the radio, but they know much of it is false. They learn from the BBC that President Habyarimana has invented a false attack by Tutsis on the Presidential Palace in order to arrest thousands. The prisons are now overflowing with Tutsis, many of whom are being tortured, starved, and even killed.

Immaculée is a gifted, sharp young woman who has thus far dedicated her life to getting a good education. Yet many of the adults around her choose fear, lies, and propaganda over the truth, a contrast with Immaculée's own increasing intellectual maturity.

During the Christmas break, Madame Sirake, a neighborhood gossip, informs Immaculée that Leonard was among those arrested. Immaculée races home, where Rose doesn't mention Leonard's arrest until Immaculée says she already knows. Rose then explains that soon after the war broke out, Leonard was arrested at work. An old schoolfriend of Leonard's, a Hutu man named Kabayi who is now a regional mayor, instructed the guards not to give Leonard food. Leonard didn't eat until he managed to bribe a guard.

This passage drives home the point that Leonard and Rose's ardent goodness makes them vulnerable to cruelty by others. It also suggests that they may be naïve in ignoring the depths of the prejudice around them. Rose keeps Leonard's arrest a secret, hoping to shield Immaculée from the truth. However, the fact that Immaculée already knows suggests that it is no longer possible (or advisable) to shelter her from reality.

After two weeks, President Habyarimana was pressured into releasing thousands of Tutsi prisoners, including Leonard. At this point Kabayi apologized and pretended it was all a misunderstanding. Immaculée's brothers insist that it is time to flee the country; Rose is worried that they are going to join the RPF, and she warns them that if they did so, it would destroy her. Back at school, Immaculée gets an excellent score on the university entrance exam, but is sure that she will be shut out of the university because of the discriminatory laws. She returns home convinced that her academic career is over.

Throughout this period in her life, Immaculée struggles to find a balance between normality and chaos. On one hand, she is just an ordinary young woman focused on school and the future. At the same time, this future is tainted not only by discrimination, but also by the imminent threats of war and even genocide. In this situation, it is difficult to know whether it is better to take extreme action, or try and keep going as if everything is normal.

CHAPTER 4: OFF TO UNIVERSITY

In the summer of 1991, Immaculée is stunned to learn that she has gained a scholarship to the National University in Butare. Her parents are so overjoyed that they immediately begin preparing a feast. Leonard plans a trip for Immaculée to the neighboring villages to let their extended family know that she will be the first woman in the family to attend university. He warns Immaculée that because she is a Tutsi woman, she will face prejudice, but Immaculée assures both her parents she will make them proud. She really wants to study psychology and philosophy, but has been assigned to the applied science program, which she is perfectly happy with.

As Leonard points out, Immaculée faces double discrimination as a Tutsi woman. The fact that she has achieved so much thus far in her life is credit to her talent, discipline, and the support of her family. However, it is possible that at a certain point these factors will not be enough to counter the prejudice and discrimination she encounters.

Arriving in Butare, Immaculée is thrilled to learn that six of her friends from Lycée, including Clementine, were also given scholarships. Immaculée's friend Sarah has already been at the university for a year and she and Immaculée have agreed to be roommates. Immaculée's scholarship gives her a monthly allowance equivalent to 30 US dollars, which seems like a "fortune" to her. She has a busy social life, hanging out with friends, attending campus dances, and performing in theatrical productions. To her delight, she gets to play the Virgin Mary.

To Immaculée, university is like paradise. Of course, she loves the educational aspect of her experience there—but she is also thrilled to experience financial independence and a rich social life. Although Immaculée is an extraordinarily bright and hard-working person, she is also like any other young person in her desires for friendship, fun, and independence.

Immaculée receives a letter from her parents that makes her realize they are struggling now that all their children have moved out. In Butare, she meets a student named John who is three years older than her and knows some of her friends from back home. John is kind and flirtatious, and the two have long conversations about religion, family, and education. Before long, they start dating. Leonard doesn't mind that John is Hutu, but he is concerned about the fact that John is Protestant and warns Immaculée not to let him convert her. Immaculée continues to get good grades, and overall her first two years at university are so wonderful that at times she forgets about the war.

Immaculée's ability to forget about the war does not mean she is naïve or self-centered. Rather, like everyone, she struggles to reconcile the daily reality of her life with the chaos and horror occurring on a larger scale. It is difficult for her to cognitively process the fact that, while everything in her personal life is going so well, Rwanda itself may be on the brink of implosion.

Yet the fighting continues in the north, and extremist parties are established all over the country. Unemployed young men join the youth leagues of these parties, many doing so because they offer free drugs and alcohol. The youth movement of President Habyarimana's party is called Interahamwe, which means "those who attack together." The movement soon becomes the "Hutu-extremist militia," and they are recognizable by the red, yellow, and green colors they wear.

While Immaculée is paving the way for a successful and happy life through education, other young people are in a quite different position. Unemployment and lack of education lead many young men to join violent organizations simply because it gives them a sense of purpose, as well as perks like drugs and alcohol.

During Easter vacation in 1993, Immaculée sees the Interahamwe for the first time. She is with John, visiting Sarah and her family in Kigali. While she and John are on a bus they see the Interahamwe rob a middle-aged Tutsi woman and strip off her clothing, pushing her to the ground. Immaculée stands up to help, but John makes her sit back down, saying that she will get into serious trouble if she intervenes.

Another major theme in the novel is the dilemma of whether to intervene in injustice or stand back in order to save oneself. As this passage illustrates, choosing between these two choices often feels impossible.

A few months later, Immaculée and Damascene are traveling to Kigali from Mataba to attend a wedding. Suddenly, the bus stops because 300 Interahamwe are blocking the road, many of them clearly drunk or on drugs. The bus driver is terrified, and says that passengers can either choose to get out or be driven the long way around. Damascene wants to stay on the bus, but Immaculée insists they should get off and walk so they don't miss the wedding. Immaculée is disturbed by Damascene's look of terror, but nonetheless assures him if they pray God will protect them. Brother and sister pray on the side of the road, holding their **rosaries**. The Interahamwe demand to see their ID cards, but eventually let them pass.

Immaculée often displays more fierce courage than the men around her, despite the fact that—as a woman—she is actually more vulnerable. As this scene shows, Immaculée's faith allows her to exhibit a level of strength and courage that she would not otherwise possess. Putting her life in God's hands means that Immaculée can face almost certain death in a calm, confident manner. In turn, this calmness helps enable her survival.

Soon after, President Habyarimana signs a peace agreement with the Tutsi rebels. This at first seems positive, but the peace agreement ironically ends up provoking more violence. One of the most senior military officers in the country, Theoneste Bagosora, reacts to the peace treaty by promising that he will bring an "apocalypse" to Rwanda.

As the actions of Theoneste Bagosora reveal, it is a disturbing truth that when confronted with the possibility of peace and harmony, some people will still choose violence, chaos, and destruction.

CHAPTER 5: RETURNING HOME

During Immaculée's third year at university, the radio waves are flooded with hateful propaganda about Tutsi "cockroaches." The announcers claim that the Tutsis are planning to kill Hutus and they chant "Hutu Power!" Immaculée finds it hard to understand how anyone takes such claims seriously, but they nonetheless disturb her. She decides to stay at university over the Easter break to study for her upcoming exams, but then receives a letter from Leonard urging her to come home immediately. Immaculée decides to go, and she is joined by Sarah's younger brother Augustine, who is close friends with Vianney.

Leonard's insistence that Immaculée come home for Easter break is the first indication that everything is really not normal. Leonard normally makes an effort to at least pretend that things are fine—now, however, he cannot help but reveal his own fear to his daughter. While the government's anti-Tutsi propaganda may be absurd, the impact it is having on the country is all too serious.

Immaculée's entire family is in Mataba except Aimable, who is in Senegal after having won a scholarship to pursue postgraduate research there. Damascene has come home from Kigali, where he works as a high school history teacher, and Vianney is on vacation from boarding school. On Easter Sunday, the family have a big feast, enjoying the day despite the haunting threat of unrest, violence, and war. It is a perfectly "typical" evening, apart from the fact that Damascene is nervous and sullen. He tells Immaculée that he saw killers with grenades and a list of Tutsi families in the area. He says that it's a "death list" and that they are planning to kill everyone on it.

Again, Immaculée looks up to Damascene as a cheerleader and guide. She trusts his judgment and is used to his reliably cheerful manner. As a result, his downcast, panicked behavior in this passage is all the more frightening. At the same time, Immaculée is now caught between trusting Damascene and trusting the rest of her family. While Damascene is aware of what appears to be the beginnings of genocide, everyone else continues to act as if everything is normal.

Leonard tries to calm Damascene down, but Damascene insists that they have to flee immediately and seek refuge in Zaire. Leonard insists that Damascene is letting his imagination get carried away, but Immaculée knows it isn't like her brother to blow things out of proportion. She suggests that Damascene might be right and they really should leave. Leonard remains firm that they are not going anywhere and declares that it is time to eat. Damascene tries to stay positive, but Immaculée can tell it's not genuine. She wishes she had known that this would be her family's last supper together.

At occasional moments throughout the novel, Immaculée's retrospective voice emerges to comment on what she did not know at the time. Often, this retrospective commentary reveals tragic realities that were hidden to her while they were actually happening. Before the genocide takes place, Immaculée remains cautiously optimistic and innocent—it is impossible for her to understand what is to come.

After saying goodnight to their parents, Immaculée, her brothers, and Augustine gather to discuss the rumors they've heard. Augustine is hesitant to disrespect Leonard, but admits that he thinks the death list is real and that they should leave that night, without Leonard and Rose. Although in some ways this plan is tempting, Damascene and Immaculée decide to wait until morning to make a decision. Immaculée goes to her room, which she compares to a "little chapel." She thinks about her relationship with Damascene. He was always seen as the "superstar" of the village, and when Immaculée was young, she would pray to become more like him.

Throughout much of her life thus far, Immaculée has been focused on emulating the example of those older and wiser than her in order to become more mature and wise herself. However, this scene suggests that age does not correlate to wisdom in all situations. Leonard and Rose may have lived through massacres before, but this has arguably made them overconfident about their chances of survival. In this moment, their children are more prudent than they are.

Just as Immaculée begins to pray, Damascene enters the room and tells her that President Habyarimana is dead. His plane was shot out of the sky the previous night. Immaculée is terrified; she is sure that this means they will certainly die. Damascene tries to reassure her that everything will be fine and that things might even get better now that Habyarimana is dead. However, they soon hear on the radio that 20 Tutsi families have already been killed in Kigali in the night. It sounds as if the announcer is a "cheerleader" for the killings. When the names of people killed are read aloud, Immaculée's Uncle Twaza is among them.

As the book demonstrates, situations can go from bad to horrific within hours over particular triggers, such as the signing of a treaty or the death of a politician. Because these individual moments are sudden and unpredictable, they escalate danger in ways that cannot be known (or prepared for) in advance. Although no one knows what will happen in the wake of Habyarimana's murder, the only certainty is that the event will bring further chaos to Rwanda.

Rose cries out in horror, and the family sits in tense silence. Augustine says he would like to go home to Kigali, but immediately afterward the radio announcer says that public transport has been suspended and that everyone should stay inside. Damascene remarks that this makes them "sitting ducks." Although the family don't realize it yet, the genocide has already begun.

One of the most tragic themes in Left to Tell *and other works of literature about genocide is the difficulty of deciding whether to stay or leave. Although leaving can be safer, abandoning one's home is no easy decision, and thus it is one often made too late.*

CHAPTER 6: NO GOING BACK

Immaculée's family, along with Augustine, spend the entire day of April 7th, 1994 listening to the radio. The Rwandan radio stations encourage Hutus to attack Tutsis with machetes. Just before evening, Immaculée finally leaves the radio and begins studying for her exams. Damascene is stunned by Immaculée's ability to do so; Immaculée pretends to be strong and calm, when in reality she is simply doing anything to try to take her mind off what is going on around her. At one point, a foreign radio station plays a message from Paul Kagame, the leader of the RPF. He promises that if the massacre of Tutsis continues, the RPF will reinvade Rwanda and "fight to the death to protect their fellow Tutsis."

Immaculée dismisses Damascene's admiration of her ability to study by saying that studying is merely a distraction technique. However, the fact that she is able to pursue this kind of distraction in the first place is extraordinary. Throughout the book, Immaculée betrays a remarkable ability to switch off from her surroundings and immerse herself in a line of thought she chooses—whether studying, prayer, or positive visualization. Indeed, this skill is part of what enables her survival.

The next day, the BBC plays an interview with Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the moderate Hutu prime minister, who says that she and her family are trapped inside their house in Kigali. During the interview, the line goes dead, and Immaculée later learns that soldiers broke into her house and assassinated her while she was on air. Rose, who is in a "kind of trance," packs the family's belongings in suitcases. Yet Leonard insists that the RPF will stop the killings. For one of the only times in her life, Immaculée tells her father that he is wrong. Meanwhile, despite Immaculée's assurances, Damascene remains convinced that he has "no future" and is going to die.

The fact that the prime minister was shot while on air shows the level of chaos into which Rwanda has descended. In such a situation, it simply becomes impossible to predict what is going to happen. As a result, Leonard and Immaculée's attempts at reassurance ring hollow. Although everyone wants to believe that everything will be ok, there is no way of knowing whether or not this is true.

That night, the family hears that the ten Belgian UN peacekeepers who had been guarding Uwilingiyimana were also shot, and that the lives of all Belgians in Rwanda are under threat. In the morning, two dozen members of the Interahamwe throw grenades into houses in Mataba, killing those who try to escape with machetes. Immaculée's family watches in horror as one of their neighbors is hacked to death in front of their eyes. Within a few hours, a couple of thousand villagers gather outside Immaculée's house, waiting for guidance from Leonard. The scene almost resembles a "family picnic," yet with the sound of grenade explosions in the background. Leonard assures his neighbors that they should stay calm and that they will find a solution together.

The strange image Immaculée depicts of the "family picnic" in the midst of a genocide highlights the surreal and horrific nature of the situation. Before the genocide began, Mataba functioned as a kind of family, with Leonard and Rose serving as parental figures to the villagers, offering advice, money, and other forms of assistance. Now this dynamic is being destroyed by the extreme violence. In contrast to the past, it seems that there is now little Leonard can do to help those in need.

That night, Leonard tells Immaculée that she needs to sleep and promises that he will protect her. Immaculée goes to bed but secretly cradles a small radio, which transmits worse and worse news as the night progresses. In the middle of the night, Immaculée goes downstairs to find that Rose has fallen asleep while guarding the door. Draped in a white sheet, she looks like a corpse, and this sight makes Immaculée burst into tears for the first time since the genocide began. She cries out to God about the injustice of the situation. However, she then tells herself that she needs to "save" her tears because things will surely get a lot worse.

Reality has become so strange and horrifying that Immaculée struggles to maintain her grasp of it. She clings to the radio in order to have information about what is happening around her, but these events are so surreal, chaotic, and ultimately unknowable that listening to radio reports does not provide much solace. Meanwhile, the vision of her mother resembling a corpse under the sheet is disturbingly prophetic. Perhaps on some level, Immaculée knows that her family is going to die.

In the early morning, Immaculée gently wakes Rose and assures her that everything is ok. She is shocked to see 10,000 Tutsis now camped out around her family home. Leonard, who has not slept, is assuring everyone that they will be ok. He encourages those gathered to trust God and know that "love will always conquer hatred." However, Leonard also adds that if the government has taken the side of the killers, then it is likely they will all die. He encourages those listening to repent and pray for forgiveness. Leonard lifts his **rosary** in the air and declares that it does not matter whether they live or die; all that matters is that they stay strong and resist evil.

Leonard's statement about the possibility of the government siding with the killers shows that he is becoming less naively optimistic about the situation. Indeed, he faces the prospect of death with the same calm confidence as Immaculée—a confidence rooted in faith. Perhaps Leonard's earlier apparent naivete wasn't naivete at all, but rather calm acceptance inspired by embracing God's control over his fate.

Only a few hours later, Interahamwe attack the crowd outside Immaculée's home. Leonard and a hundred other Tutsi men chase away the killers, but it is certain that this is only a momentary victory. After the attack Immaculée puts on her scapular, which Catholics wear in order to help ensure their passage to heaven. She brings it to Leonard and asks him to wear it. In return, Leonard gives her his **rosary**. Immaculée promises that she will always keep it with her.

The idea of parents as protectors of children has crumbled in the context of the genocide. Under such extreme circumstances, parents and children assume a mutual duty to protect and guide each other. Immaculée and Leonard's exchange of the scapular and rosary conveys their total adoration and trust in one another.

Suddenly there are shouts announcing that the killers are back. Leonard runs toward them carrying his spear, while Rose runs after him screaming that if he goes alone he will certainly be killed. She shouts at the other Tutsi men in the crowd, asking why they are not supporting Leonard. While Rose and Leonard argue, the killers leave, perhaps because they saw the vast number of Tutsis gathered around the house. However, Immaculée knows that they will be back soon.

The assembly of Tutsis outside Leonard's house confers a hint of hope; after all, there is strength in numbers. However, this strength is only made possible when each person is prepared to put themselves on the line for one another, and this passage suggests that this might not be true of the crowd outside Leonard's house.

Damascene instructs Immaculée to stay with Pastor Murinzi, warning her that if the killers catch her, not only will she be murdered but also raped. At first Immaculée refuses to the leave the family, but Leonard agrees that, as a young woman, she must go. On Leonard's suggestion, Immaculée takes Augustine with her. Leonard promises to come and collect Pastor Murnizi when the tensions blow over. These are the last words he will ever say to her.

Immaculée may be an exceptionally confident and brave young woman, but her gender makes her vulnerable to violence in ways that simply cannot be ignored. In the end, it is this vulnerability—or rather, the extra protection she receives because of it—that ends up saving her life.

Pastor Murinzi lives five miles away from Immaculée's family. While Augustine and Immaculée are walking, they pass a crowd of Hutus carrying weapons, and Immaculée feels certain that they are about to be killed. However, God is watching over them. A Hutu friend of Leonard's who is standing nearby warns the crowd not to hurt Immaculée or Augustine. Momentarily safe, they continue on their way.

This is the first of many moments in the novel where Immaculée is confronted face-to-face with killers, but miraculously escapes unharmed. The fact that this happens so many times is, to Immaculée, proof that God was watching over her and sparing her life for a special purpose.

CHAPTER 7: THE PASTOR'S HOUSE

Pastor Murinzi lives in a large, lavish, European-style house. He greets Immaculée with a smile; he is a close friend of her family, and also John's uncle. Immaculée once heard her aunt say that the pastor "resented" Leonard's good actions, but he has always been kind to Immaculée. Pastor Murinzi takes Immaculée and Augustine into his living room, where guests are gathered. Among them is Buhoro, and when Immaculée sees him she smiles. However, he turns away in disgust, and Immaculée realizes that he is a Hutu extremist. Immaculée then sees Janet, her friend from primary school. However, to Immaculée's horror Janet also pushes her away.

Immaculée has known the people she encounters in this scene for years, but the genocide has transformed Mataba into an entirely new place in which a whole different set of social norms apply. Not only is it acceptable to treat Tutsis rudely, but this is expected and encouraged, viewed as evidence of being "a good Hutu."

Pastor Murinzi's youngest son, Lechim, is another of Immaculée's close friends from primary school, and was the first boy she ever kissed. Now, he comforts and reassures her, telling her that she can stay in his sister's room. Lechim's mother was Tutsi, although she died a few years earlier. Augustine starts crying. He is Hutu but looks Tutsi, and he overheard people in the living room saying he is a spy for the RPF. Immaculée assures him that he is not going to die, although she is not convinced of this herself.

Pastor Murinzi's marriage to a Tutsi woman and Augustine's ethnically ambiguous physical appearance highlight how flimsy the categories of "Tutsi" and "Hutu" really are. Yet while there may be very little substantial difference between the tribes, the distinction has quickly turned into a matter of life or death.

Immaculée lies down in Dusenge's room and thinks about the events of the past few days. Before long, Damascene rushes in to tell her that the killers have burned down their family home. Leonard has gone to Kabayi for help even though Kabayi tried to starve him in prison. Leonard was able to return home accompanied by soldiers, but the soldiers then summoned the killers, who attacked the crowd of Tutsis who'd been camped out around the house. The killers burned down the house, and Leonard and Rose escaped on the motorcycle. Damascene cries out that they are now trapped, and he angrily asks Immaculée why she kept assuring them that everything was going to be ok.

Everything is so chaotic at this point that there is no chance of relying on reason, intelligence, foresight, or planning in order to ensure survival. All these measures are meaningless in the face of the sudden, unpredictable horror that has descended on Rwanda. Even Immaculée's incredibly close-knit family has been wrenched apart and flung into many different directions. There is an extent to which Immaculée has already been left alone, with only herself and God to rely on.

Immaculée decides that she cannot give up hope and promises Damascene that they will survive. Damascene tells her to stay with Augustine and not to leave the house under any circumstances. Damascene decides to stay with a Hutu friend who lives nearby. As it comes time for Immaculée and Damascene to say goodbye, she is so sad she can barely look at him. When she holds his hands, they feel like the hands of "a disappearing soul." Damascene smiles sadly and leaves.

Immaculée's separation from Damascene is one of the most heart-wrenching moments in the book. Immaculée characterizes Damascene as full of happiness, humor, and vitality, but at this point he is barely present, already haunted by death. Again, the comment about him being "a disappearing soul" suggests Immaculée has a hint of foresight into his fate.

CHAPTER 8: FAREWELL TO THE BOYS

One of Vianney's high school teachers named Nzima knocks on Pastor Murinzi's front door. His voice is full of desperation as he asks if he is going to be killed. He admits that he is having visions of his wife and children being murdered. Immaculée suggests that Nzima stay at the pastor's house, but Nzima refuses, and Immaculée then realizes that Pastor Murinzi must have already said that he couldn't stay. Nzima leaves, and Immaculée later learns that he was murdered only a few hundred yards from the pastor's house.

Immaculée's own position of powerlessness means that she is not able to help others as she would wish, making the whole situation even more painful. Instead of helping, Immaculée is simply forced to be a witness to the gruesome deaths of her friends, family members, and neighbors.

Hours later, Immaculée is sitting alone in a bedroom when Pastor Murinzi opens the door and leads five other Tutsi women into the room, telling them to stay there and be quiet. Immaculée barely knows the women, but they sit together in silence while terrifying cries of "Kill them all!" can be heard from outside the house. Some of the women dive under the bed, until Immaculée spots a crawl space where they can hide. They stay there for two hours, sweating and struggling to breathe. When Pastor Murinzi returns, he is shocked and confused until Immaculée pokes her head out of the hole and tells him the women are hiding there.

In many scenes in the book, Immaculée assumes a leadership role and helps others to escape death. In some ways, Immaculée is an unlikely leader; she is a humble, reflective person who does not have much of an ego. At the same time, her ability to stay calm and solve problems even under the most difficult of circumstances naturally positions her as a leader, particularly when those around her become hysterical or frozen with fear.

Pastor Murinzi explains that the killers are going into every house. He promises not to turn the women away, but explains that he's going to have to pretend that he has done so. No one in the house can know that they remain there, otherwise they will certainly be killed. He decides to hide them in a small room, starting early tomorrow morning. He then tells Immaculée that Augustine and Vianney must leave, because it is too dangerous for him to hide men. Immaculée tries to argue with him, but he won't listen. She is grateful to the pastor for sheltering her, but worries that, as has happened during previous massacres, he may only be hiding Tutsi women in the hope of raping or marrying them once there are no Tutsi men around to defend them.

Immaculée's relationship to Pastor Murinzi is particularly difficult. Because he is risking his life to shelter her, Immaculée cannot defy the pastor's wishes—even if that means turning out her own brother and friend to be killed on the street. Again, Immaculée's absolute powerlessness in this situation is heartbreaking. Not only is she living through horror, but she is absolutely powerless to do anything to intervene.

That night, Immaculée lies in agony thinking about Augustine and Vianney's fate. One of the other Tutsi women, Therese, tries to comfort her by saying that, as "strong men," they will be able to survive. Therese is a mother herself and promises Immaculée that the best thing to do is stay at the pastor's house and let the boys go. In the early hours of the morning, Pastor Murinzi wakes Immaculée and brings her down to say goodbye to Vianney and Augustine. She must tell them that they can no longer stay at the pastor's house, and tries to be strong and encouraging as Vianney desperately asks her where they will go. She squeezes Vianney and promises him they will meet again. The boys then walk out into the night.

Surviving the genocide at times requires deliberate self-deception. Both Therese and Immaculée know that Augustine and Vianney will likely not survive; in the context of the genocide, it is meaningless to say that they are "strong men." Rather, just like Immaculée and all other Tutsis, they are perceived as walking targets by killers who will show no mercy.

CHAPTER 9: INTO THE BATHROOM

After saying goodbye to Vianney and Augustine, Immaculée joins the other Tutsi women as they are led by Pastor Murinzi into a bathroom that is only four by three feet in size. Immaculée cannot understand how all six of them will fit inside there. Pastor Murinzi explains that they cannot flush the toilet or use the shower unless they hear someone in the bathroom next door doing so as well, and then it must be done at exactly the same time to mask the sound. The pastor guesses that the killings will go on for another week, and that hiding in the bathroom gives the women the best chance of survival.

The bathroom symbolizes the seeming impossibility of survival. Immaculée is not sure how the women will even fit in there, let alone how they will remain there for multiple days in a row, unable to move, make any sound, or wash. Yet the direness of the situation requires that they must be willing to try anything. The only other option is certain death.

After Pastor Murinzi leaves, Immaculée silently prays for God to protect her family. She feels resentment toward the pastor for not protecting Vianney and Augustine, and prays to God to help her forgive him. She looks at the others in the bathroom: 14-year-old Athanasia and 12-year-old Beata, who is still wearing her school uniform. There is also 55-year-old Therese, her daughter Claire, and her other daughter Sanda, who is only seven. The group of them sit in silence. On occasion, they take turns silently standing up and stretching, but only for a couple of minutes before sitting down again. Immaculée hears the birds singing and envies their freedom.

Throughout the book, Immaculée refers to the "women" who are with her in the bathroom. However, this passage makes clear that most of them are in fact only girls. The fact that Beata is still wearing her school uniform highlights her youth and the ongoing theme of youthful promise interrupted by hatred and violence. Like Immaculée and the others in the bathroom, Beata's future is looking increasingly impossible.

Sitting in the bathroom is painfully uncomfortable, and Immaculée finds it impossible to sleep. The morning after they begin hiding there, they overhear Pastor Murinzi promising someone that he is "a good Hutu" and that he would never hide Tutsis. Immaculée reflects that if the killers found her and the other Tutsi women in the bathroom, they would kill Pastor Murinzi as well for being a "traitor." Immaculée cradles Beata on her lap and manages to fall asleep. By the time she wakes up, it is 11pm, and Pastor Murinzi delivers some food—the first thing the women have eaten since arriving in the bathroom. He is saddened by how quickly they devour it and advises them to rest.

Pastor Murinzi is a complex character. Immaculée often portrays him in a less than sympathetic light, and many of his actions over the course of the narrative are cruel. This is difficult to reconcile with the fact that he sacrificed his life (as well as the lives of his family members) in order to save Immaculée and the other Tutsi women. This seeming contradiction is a reminder that all people are flawed and capable of committing good and evil—often simultaneously.

By the next day, the women have invented a sign language with which to silently communicate with one another. Immaculée is desperately worried about her family, and thanks God that at least Aimable is safe due to being abroad. Later that day, they hear the killers again, shouting that they want to "wipe [Tutsis] from the face of the earth." Immaculée peers out of the bathroom's window through a small hole in the curtain. The killers are dressed in demonic costumes, and Immaculée sees dozens of people she knows, including many of Mataba's "most prominent citizens."

Inside the bathroom, the tiny "community" of Tutsi women has become so close so quickly that they can communicate without speaking. This is a stark contrast to what is occurring outside. There, the community of Mataba (and indeed all of Rwanda) is falling apart, as neighbor turns on neighbor with horrifying speed.

Immaculée closes her eyes and prays to God to save them. For the first time, she hears the voice of the devil inside her head. The devil mocks her for asking God for help and for thinking that she has any chance of survival. The devil calls her "nothing" and tells her she deserves to die. Yet Immaculée insistently prays to God, acknowledging her weakness but asking for forgiveness. As the devil mocks her for believing that she should be saved while so many have been gruesomely murdered, Immaculée reminds herself that God is love and that God would never abandon her. She prays as hard as she can, but the voice of the devil never fully goes away.

Up until this point, Immaculée always described her faith as coming easily. She has always loved God and been ardently religious, and has never mentioned the presence of doubt in her mind. However, the extraordinary circumstance of the genocide derails even Immaculée's normally rock-solid faith. Significantly, the devil mocks Immaculée for believing that she would be saved when so many others are perishing—a form of preemptive survivor's guilt.

When Pastor Murinzi returns that evening, Immaculée is in a "trance," holding her rosary and barely cognizant of her surroundings. Therese and Beata are also deep in prayer. Pastor Murinzi laughs and tells them to calm down because the killers left seven hours ago. He brings the women more food, but this time they are all too drained and exhausted to eat. It is raining noisily, so the pastor is able to speak to the women. He describes the crazed behavior of the killers, who stabbed his furniture and suitcases in case there were any Tutsi babies in there. Their eyes were "glazed and red," which made the pastor think they must have been on drugs. The killers promised to come back and search the house again.

A surprising parallel emerges here between the Tutsi women in the bathroom and the Hutu killers outside. Both are in a trance of some kind, cut off from the reality of what is happening around them. Of course, in Immaculée's case, this trance is positive, as it emerges from her deep connection with God, whereas the killers achieve a trance state through drugs and alcohol. Both cases, however, show how difficult it is for humans to face the reality of such horror.

The next day Pastor Murinzi tells the women that there are rumors he is hiding them and that a different group of killers will be returning to search the house more thoroughly. Immaculée wishes that God would let them be killed straight away rather than putting them through this ongoing agony. She prays, and in that moment, has a flash of inspiration. She asks the pastor to push his wardrobe in front of the bathroom door to hide it. He is uncertain, but after Immaculée begs him he agrees. Once the pastor leaves, the other women ask how Immaculée got such a good idea, and she replies that it was from God.

Whenever Immaculée feels close to giving up, she ends up being reinvigorated by prayer. Objectively her situation seems completely hopeless, a drawn out torture on top of the unimaginable horror of the genocide itself. Yet through her connection with God, she finds hope and inspiration in the midst of this absolutely bleak scenario, and this hope helps her to survive.

CHAPTER 10: CONFRONTING MY ANGER

Despite the incredibly cramped conditions, Immaculée does not recall feeling embarrassed of using the toilet in front of the other women or recall any bad smells from their time in the bathroom, because all these things were "trivial" in the context of their battle for survival. Sometimes Pastor Murinzi isn't able to bring the women food until 3 or 4am and sometimes what he brings them is disgusting. The constant fear of the killers returning is a form of "mental and physical torture." To survive, Immaculée spends "every waking moment" deep in prayer. Sometimes she prays so hard that she begins to sweat. During breaks from saying prayers, she reflects on her favorite Bible passages. Prayer feels like "armor" protecting her from her ordeal.

In this passage, Immaculée contrasts the abysmal physical conditions in which she is living with the power of prayer as a form of protection against these conditions. Indeed, it is testament to the power of Immaculée's faith that her mental connection with God is able to overwhelm the physical and psychic agony she suffers in the bathroom. Indeed, Immaculée prays so intensely that it turns into a physical sensation, thereby dismantling the distinction between mental and physical experience.

A week into Immaculée's time in the bathroom, she and the other women overhear Pastor Murinzi talking to his son, Sembeba. Sembeba suggests that Tutsis deserve to be massacred; in school he learned that Tutsis did the same thing to Hutus hundreds of years ago and that the killings are thus a form of "self-defense." Immaculée is so angry that she wants to jump up and shout. She thinks about how, after the Nazi Holocaust, all the most powerful countries in the world promised that such a thing would never happen again. However, Immaculée is now living through another genocide. Pastor Murinzi yells at his son, calling him stupid and reminding him that his Tutsi relatives are being massacred. Sembeba accuses his father of hiding Tutsis in the house.

Once again, Immaculée's pain is greatly intensified by her profound powerlessness. Not only is she unable to tell Sembeba he is wrong, but she—like everyone else who witnesses the Rwandan genocide whether from up close or far away—is devasted by her own powerlessness in stopping the genocide from occurring in the first place. After the Nazi Holocaust, it seemed momentarily possible that there would never again be another genocide—however, humanity has ultimately proven powerless in ensuring one doesn't.

Later that day, the killers return, but once again they do not find the women. That night, Pastor Murinzi comes into the bathroom with a look of horror on his face. He tells the women that this is nothing like the massacres of 1959 or 1973. The government has shut down the country until every last Tutsi is killed. Many Tutsis fled to churches, but the killers then locked the doors and burned alive those inside. There are piles of bodies as high as houses, and the smell of decaying corpses is suffocating. He tells the women that they might be the only Tutsis still alive in the country. The other women cry, but Immaculée is filled with anger. She feels a desperate urge to destroy the whole country and kill everyone in it.

Pastor Murinzi's description of the outside world suggests that this world has been completely drained of humanity. All that is left is bloodthirsty violence, horror, and decay. It is perhaps unsurprising that Immaculée's only reaction to hearing about such intense devastation is to crave more devastation. In her state of total powerlessness, she fantasizes about having the power to destroy everything—even as such a fantasy goes completely against her nature and beliefs.

Immaculée asks Pastor Murinzi to turn on the radio in his room so the women can listen, and he agrees. A government minister encourages every Hutu listening to kill all the Tutsis in the country. Immaculée realizes with horror that Pastor Murinzi was telling the truth. She also concludes that Leonard had been mistaken in trusting the government. Later, the pastor switches to the BBC and Immaculée hears that the RPF have reached Kigali and that the extremist Hutu government is on the verge of collapse. Immaculée is hopeful that the RPF might reach them in a matter of weeks, yet wonders if this will still be too late.

Immaculée's view of the war, the genocide, and indeed of Rwanda in general is changing by the minute. The country is in such a chaotic state that nobody truly understands what is happening—including the perpetrators of the violence. While in this moment Immaculée believes that Leonard was too trusting of the government, elsewhere in the book she emphasizes the importance of never losing trust, faith, and hope in others.

CHAPTER 11: STRUGGLING TO FORGIVE

Immaculée is praying with the **rosary** when the killers return to search the house. She always struggles with the part of the Lord's prayer about forgiveness, because she is not sure that she can forgive the killers. On the other side of the bathroom door, the killers are searching the wardrobe and laughing. Immaculée is horrified and momentarily wishes that they would burn in hell. She hears the voice of the devil again, pointing out that she is also guilty of hatred because she wanted the killers to suffer. The devil calls her a liar for asking God to save her when she does not have forgiveness in her heart, and Immaculée realizes that the devil is right. At the same time, she feels like being asked to forgive the killers is unfair and "impossible."

The voice of doubt in Immaculée's mind thrives on her own desires for destruction and revenge. As soon as Immaculée begins to give in to negative thinking—however justified—the voice of the devil encourages a spiral of negativity, driving her father from God. Immaculée knows that practicing unconditional love and forgiveness is a mandate from God, but her situation is so extreme that she momentarily wavers in her commitment to carry out God's will.

The killers leave, and Immaculée prays in gratitude. However, she struggles with the feeling that her prayers are "hollow." She asks God to open her heart to forgiveness and spends the next week so wrapped up in prayer that she barely eats or drinks and isn't aware of having slept. One night she hears screaming, followed by the cries of a baby. She realizes that the killers must have murdered the child's mother and left it to die. By morning, the baby's cries have stopped. When Immaculée asks God how she can forgive people who would do that to a child, she hears God tell her: "You are *all* My children… and the baby is with Me now."

This is a crucial turning point in the book. Up until this moment, Immaculée has focused on the victims of the genocide, responding to the great injustice of the loss of so many lives. However, here God reminds her that she must also think of the killers as former innocents who have been corrupted. God created every human as good, and thus Immaculée must love the killers just as she loves innocent babies.

This is the moment Immaculée has been waiting for. She sees the killers as children who are hurting others and themselves, but not as fundamentally evil. She prays that God will help the killers see the error in their ways while they still have time left on Earth. She hears God telling her to forgive the killers, "for they know not what they do." Guided by God, she feels love, forgiveness, and pity for the killers. That night she sleeps peacefully for the first time since entering the bathroom.

Immaculée's desire to forgive is rooted in selflessness, but it also benefits her. Without forgiving the killers, Immaculée cannot find peace. Forgiveness reminds her of God's love and purpose for her life. Forgiveness is thus a way of turning back to God in the midst of the horror and meaningless of the genocide.

CHAPTER 12: NO FRIENDS TO TURN TO

Immaculée retreats into prayer, and this becomes her sanctuary in the bathroom. She spends hours at a time thinking about the meaning of a single word such as "forgiveness" or "hope." By the end of the first month that the women spend in the bathroom, Pastor Murinzi's patience appears to be running out. He accuses Leonard of being "a very bad Tutsi," saying that he was helping the RPF to plan. civil war. He then tells the other women that if they are killed, it will be because Immaculée is there. The pastor adds that the killers found 600 guns, grenades, and a death list of Hutu names in Immaculée's house. He says that the massacre of Tutsis was indeed self-defense, because otherwise Tutsis would have murdered Hutus.

While Pastor Murinzi is certainly an ambiguous figure, his willingness to believe propaganda about Leonard is still rather stunning. Given Leonard's reputation as a "saint" in the community, how could it be that he was secretly planning to massacre Hutus the whole time? Perhaps Pastor Murinzi's willingness to believe this myth is evidence that the genocide has warped the pastor's reasoning and led him to want to believe that Leonard and other Tutsis are guilty, because the reality is too awful to bear.

Immaculée is in disbelief that Pastor Murinzi has been duped by the government's propaganda campaigns. In the back of her mind, Immaculée believes that the lies about her father probably mean that he is dead. However, she suppresses the thought. Eventually, she cannot help but cry out in protest. She asks why, if her father had so many weapons, would he not have used them against the killers who attacked his house? Everyone in the bathroom is astonished that Immaculée stood up to Pastor Murinzi. The pastor meekly continues to recite the "evidence" criminalizing Leonard, but it is clear he is embarrassed and realizes that he is wrong.

The knowledge that her father is likely dead emboldens Immaculée with a rather reckless sense of courage and determination. Perhaps confronting the reality that Leonard might be dead helps Immaculée to accept her own death. In multiple ways, Immaculée's view of her father pivots very quickly in this moment: she sees him as vulnerable, and in doing so decides she must make a stand and demand that he be respected.

Before Pastor Murinzi leaves, Immaculée asks if she can borrow a Bible, and he agrees. Immaculée worries that the pastor's outburst means that he thinks the women will die soon, because Rwandans are normally private about their emotions. Later, Immaculée hears on the radio that more Tutsis have been killed in her own province, Kibuye, than anywhere else. The president expresses his pride over this fact, and explains that he is sending money to buy food and beer so the killers can celebrate. After, Immaculée hears Janet standing outside and saying that she is a liar. Janet adds that she doesn't care if Immaculée is killed. To make matters worse, Immaculée then hears on the radio that over 500 Tutsis and "their Hutu traitor" friends have been killed at her university.

Everything that Immaculée once treasured—her hometown, her family, her friends, her education—has disappeared from sight. To make matters worse, she then hears news of these things being gruesomely destroyed. The fact that she requests a Bible from Pastor Murinzi, however, reminds us that she still has God to turn to. No matter what she loses, nobody can take her faith away from her. And in the midst of all this terrible destruction, Immaculée's request for a Bible indicates that she has not yet given up hope.

Immaculée begins to pray, but is interrupted by the sound of another woman's voice. It is a kind, elderly woman Immaculée knows named Sony, whose husband was killed in the massacre of 1973. Sony begs Pastor Murinzi to let her in, but he tells her he cannot hide Tutsis and shuts the door. Immaculée knows that Sony now faces certain death and prays for God to receive her soul in heaven. Pastor Murinzi opens the bathroom door and gives Immaculée a Bible. She immediately reads Psalm 91, which ends: "Though a thousand fall at my side, though ten thousand are dying around me, the evil will not touch me."

When Immaculée hears Sony begging for her life and being turned away, there is an extra layer of guilt involved. Although she cannot know for sure how he would behave otherwise, the pastor's coldness to other Tutsis is necessitated by the fact that he is hiding Immaculée and the other women. While Immaculée may not be responsible for Sony's death, she's clearly aware that her own survival comes at a terrible price.

CHAPTER 13: A GATHERING OF ORPHANS

Over a month has passed since Immaculée arrived in the bathroom. The killers keep coming back to Pastor Murinzi's house, but they have not found the women. Every day brings worse and worse radio reports; when farmers begin to complain that their crops are dying from neglect, a government representative insists that they remain focused on killing Tutsis even if they must spend time in the fields. One day government soldiers give Pastor Murinzi a gun, which he is forced to accept in order not to look like a traitor. The UN evacuated its peacekeepers soon after the genocide began, although around 200 soldiers refused the order and remained. Their leader begs other countries to send troops into Rwanda, but none do so. The United States has not even acknowledged that the genocide is real.

Those responsible for the genocide have embraced death and destruction so much that they are basically encouraging people to neglect their crops in order to spend more time killing Tutsis. This instruction goes beyond all reason, and demonstrates the maniacal determination of the Hutu extremists' embrace of murder. Rwanda has been turned into a hellscape, and this reality is so awful that the international community simply chooses to ignore it.

On the bright side, the RPF are still making advances through Rwanda. Sometimes the BBC plays messages of Paul Kagame telling Tutsis not to lose hope. Meanwhile, Pastor Murinzi is getting increasingly panicked about what he will do with the women, worrying that he is soon going to run out of food. One day he asks them to pray that the government forces win the war; Immaculée pretends to do so, but actually prays for the souls of the Tutsis who have been massacred. The pastor then reveals that after the war is over, there will be no Tutsis left. He plans to smuggle the women out to an island in the middle of Lake Kivu and marry them off to Abashi tribesmen. Immaculée and the other women are horrified, because they consider the Abashi to be primitive.

This passage reminds us that even if Immaculée achieves the impossible and survives the genocide, her future after would be uncertain at best, and potentially very bleak. Without the family, community, and infrastructure that enabled her happy and successful life before the genocide, she would be at the complete mercy of strangers. Furthermore, a post-genocide country would not instantly transform back into paradise, but would rather surely be rife with a whole new set of tensions and problems.

Although Pastor Murinzi clearly considers the women to be "orphans" with no family left on Earth, Immaculée does not feel that way because of her connection with God. She spends 15-20 hours a day praying, and now knows she's been born again as "the loving daughter of God, my father." As the genocide continues, Pastor Murinzi's other children return home. Eventually the pastor can no longer bear to keep the secret of the Tutsi women alone, so he tells his two most trusted children, Lechim and Dusenge. When Lechim and Dusenge come to see the bathroom, they greet Immaculée warmly, which brings her solace. They return often, sometimes brining a cup of tea.

Both Immaculée's intensive prayer and Pastor Murinzi's confession to his children prove how much a burden can be eased by sharing it with others—whether one's own children or God. Whereas Sembeba's hatefulness and accusations served as an ominous sign about what might happen if Pastor Murinzi's family found out about the women, in this passage it seems that Sembeba's prejudice might make him the odd one out in his family.

In the middle of May, Pastor Murinzi brings two more Tutsi women into the bathroom named Malaba and Solange. Malaba is about the same age as Immaculée and Solange is a teenager; one of the pastor's daughters, Marianne, had been secretly hiding them in her house in the north of the country. Because Marianne was known as being kind to Tutsis, it eventually became too dangerous for her to hide the women. She managed to get a fake identity card for Malaba listing her as Hutu, and sent both women off loaded with weapons.

Again, just as it seems that all hope has been lost, more acts of kindness, generosity, and self-sacrifice emerge to suggest that the world is not quite as bad as it previously appeared. Yet while the arrival of Malaba on Solange is on one level a joyous occasion, they are also making an already cramped, uncomfortable space even more full.

The women describe the horrors they witnessed on their journey, explaining that the killers were even murdering Hutus who forgot their identity cards or who opposed the killing of Tutsis. The women survived by screaming "Hutu Power! Kill all the cockroaches!" They explain that there are so many dead bodies strewn across the country that at first they thought the piles were trash or clothes, not corpses.

As Malaba and Solange's stories reveal, surviving a genocide requires behaving in a way one would never have previously thought possible. When all semblance of normality fades away, it is easy for a person to become unrecognizable to themselves in order to survive.

That night, Immaculée sees Jesus in her sleep. He tells her that when she leaves the bathroom almost all her loved ones will be dead, but explains that her family is with him now. Immaculée wakes up happy, though over the course of the day she begins to feel sad about her family. Soon after, she overhears people talking outside about the death of a Tutsi man who had a master's degree. The killers chopped his skull open, claiming they wanted to see what the brain of someone who had a master's degree looked like. Immaculée realizes with horror that this was likely Damascene, and she prays that it wasn't him. Later, she asks Pastor Murinzi if he has heard anyone talking about Damascene's death; he says he hasn't, but she can tell he's lying. Immaculée cries hysterically, as the women around her silently beg her to stop. Eventually she does, and never cries in the bathroom again.

Immaculée is constantly oscillating between different states of emotion while in the bathroom. Within hours or even minutes, she can go from peaceful to devastated, stoic to hysterical. While the room in which she sits is claustrophobically small and unchanging, her psyche reflects the unknown turmoil of the world outside. Perhaps even worse than visualizing Damascene and other members of her family being killed is the fact that she cannot know for sure whether this has happened. As a result, Immaculée is left a wild mess of conflicting emotions.

CHAPTER 14: THE GIFT OF TONGUES

After seven weeks in the bathroom, the women are all frighteningly thin. They haven't washed or changed clothes since their arrival and have thus developed an awful infestation of body lice. Nonetheless, Immaculée feels "beautiful" through her connection with God. She gets sick twice while in the bathroom, but both times has complete trust that after everything, God will not let her die from a simple illness.

The intensity of Immaculée's faith means that she has transcended bodily experience. Like a nun or a saint, Immaculée's relationship with God is so close that she becomes distanced from the physical reality of the mortal world. This allows her to survive and eases her suffering.

One day, Pastor Murinzi excitedly tells the women that the United Nations is considering sending peacekeeping troops back to Rwanda, which might put a stop to the genocide. The pastor explains that because most of the RPF soldiers grew up in Uganda, they speak English, and that even those who know French refuse to speak it. Suddenly, God puts an idea in Immaculée's mind. She realizes that the RPF are going to win the war, that she will meet many English-speaking people after the genocide ends, and has a "premonition" that she will work at the United Nations. The next day, she asks Pastor Murinzi for a French-English dictionary and any other books he has in English. She says that if she learns English she will be able to tell everyone how brave he was after the genocide ends.

It is remarkable that in the midst of her battle for survival in an apocalyptic moment, Immaculée still has the capacity for hope, positive thinking, planning, and self-education. The future may be completely unknown to her, but her faith in God makes her trust that there will be life after the genocide. This is because she believes that if God spared her, it was for a special reason or purpose. It is up to Immaculée to figure out what this purpose is and work toward achieving it—even if she remains confined to a tiny bathroom.

Flattered, Pastor Murinzi brings Immaculée the dictionary and the only two English books he has, and she immediately gets to work. At the end of her first day of study, she proudly mouths the first sentence she has learned how to say: "I am Immaculée." As she keeps studying, she focuses on the words that will be most important in helping to tell her story: "escape, hiding, war, prayer, job, and God." Discovering a section of the dictionary dedicated to grammar is like receiving "manna from heaven." After Immaculée has read the books Pastor Murinzi gave her countless times, she borrows pen and paper and begins writing a letter to the kind, honest UN soldier she imagines saving them.

Immaculée's first sentence in English demonstrates why the experience of learning a new language is so important to her in this moment. Expressing herself in English is a way for Immaculée to assert herself and her own humanity, and to tell her story. Because English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, mastering it will allow Immaculée to communicate her story to as many people as possible. As a result, she sees learning English as a gift straight from God.

In June, Immaculée is reunited with the man she dated for two years in university, John. They'd fallen out when John called off their engagement party at the last minute, but she'd always imagined that they would ultimately remain together. During her time in the bathroom, she had kept him in her prayers, hoping he was safe from the killings. John arrives along with much of Pastor Murinzi's extended family, who have evacuated their homes in Kigali after the RPF arrived in the city. Immaculée is thrilled to hear John's voice through the bathroom window.

This is the first time Immaculée has even mentioned the end of her engagement to John. For many people, such a thing would constitute a major life event. Yet Immaculée's life has become so abnormal and tumultuous that it barely registers. She may have been hurt by John calling off the engagement, but in the context of the genocide it scarcely seems to matter.

Late that night, John comes to see Immaculée in the bathroom and the two of them embrace tightly. John is shocked by how thin Immaculée has become, and he says that he has been praying that nobody had raped or killed her, before adding: "here you are, alive and unraped!" Immaculée feels awkward. John does not seem like the same person she knew before the genocide. Over time, she begins to resent his freedom and comfort, as well as the lack of care and respect he is showing her. She reads 1 Corinthians 13:4, reminding herself that "love is patient and kind," and this assures her that her relationship with John is not the one she truly wants. He doesn't make an effort with her, and when she confronts him about it he replies that there are "no other men looking at you." At this moment, Immaculée knows their love is gone.

Immaculée may believe in the importance of patience, forgiveness, humility, and unconditional love, but this does not mean that she has to put up with bad treatment by others. Indeed, throughout the book Immaculée also exhibits an impressive capacity to stand up for herself. This capacity emerges from the confidence and self-love she possesses as a devoutly religious person. She knows that God loves her and sees her as special, and thus she expects others to treat her with respect.

CHAPTER 15: UNLIKELY SAVIORS

In mid-June, Immaculée overhears Sembeba and his friends discussing a horrifying incident in which a mother was gang raped in front of her husband and three young children before the whole family was killed. After hearing more dreadful stories, she puts her hands over her ears and begs God to let her die and go to heaven now rather than live longer on Earth. However, eventually the boys begin talking about the war, saying that Kigali may soon be captured by the RPF. They also say that France is sending troops to Rwanda, which they think will help defeat the RPF because of France's close ties to the Hutu government. However, Immaculée reasons that if the French do come, they will bring the attention of the world, and this will surely end the genocide.

This is another moment in which Immaculée makes it appear as if God is listening and manipulates her state of mind in order to ensure that she doesn't give up hope. Overhearing the conversation between Sembeba and his friends is a form of mental and emotional torture for Immaculée—however, just when she thinks she can no longer bear it, she realizes that the conversation also contains a small kernel of hope. Even in the darkest moments, hope can be found in unexpected places.

Later, Immaculée hears a radio report saying that the French plan to establish a camp at Lake Kivu, which is not far from Mataba. When the troops arrive, the Hutu government throws a big celebration, which Pastor Murinzi says proves that the French have arrived to help the slaughter of Tutsis. However, soon after the French announce that they want to establish "safe havens" for Tutsi survivors of the genocide and that any Tutsi who can reach a French camp will be protected there. Immaculée thanks God for this news. A few days later, she is overjoyed to hear a French helicopter circling in the sky above her.

The sound of the helicopter flying above recalls the birds that Immaculée envied earlier in the book. While Immaculée is trapped in a bathroom, forced into silent immobility, the birds and helicopters above not only fly freely, but also make noise. It might be strange to imagine being jealous of a helicopter, but the extremity of Immaculée's situation means that it is not an unreasonable response.

Immaculée tells Pastor Murinzi that she thinks the women should try to reach a French camp, but the pastor responds that this is "a bad idea." He doesn't trust that the French are truly going to help Tutsis and warns that they will probably kill her on sight. Immaculée says she would rather be shot quickly by the French than give the Interahamwe killers "the satisfaction" of gruesomely murdering her. Pastor Murinzi is surprised, and eventually agrees to take the women—though warns them that it is so dangerous outside that he is not optimistic about their chances.

Pastor Murinzi's concern for the women's safety appears to be genuine. Yet his conversation with Immaculée shows that they have starkly different mindsets and attitudes toward the question of survival. Immaculée wants to survive, but she doesn't fear death and would rather die trying to live on her own terms if the opportunity presents itself.

Immaculée explains that Pastor Murinzi worried the women had gone crazy, so in the middle of the night he brought them down to an empty bedroom to watch a movie. The women have been sitting down for so long that they have difficulty walking. Although they cannot turn the sound on, Immaculée loses herself in the story, beginning to confuse fiction and reality and worrying that the killers are inside the film. She must remind herself that it is not even set in Rwanda. Unfortunately, one of Pastor Murinzi's houseboys sees the flickering TV and informs a group of killers that the rumors are true, the pastor is hiding Tutsis in his house. When the pastor tells the women, he looks terrified, and prays that God takes their lives quickly if they must die.

At the end of this chapter, it seems as if the pastor's act of kindness may end up costing the women their lives. The movie should be a happy event, a treat after months of living squashed in a stark bathroom with almost no distractions or ability to communicate. However, the fact that the houseboy sees the screen shows that even the most basic human acts are rendered impossible in the context of the genocide. Something as ordinary as watching a film can lead to death.

CHAPTER 16: KEEPING THE FAITH

Immaculée can hear the killers shouting her name, and realizes with horror that they know where she is. Even her prayers are stalled by fear and dread, as she can hear the killers inside Pastor Murinzi's bedroom, right next to the bathroom door. One killer boasts that he has killed 399 "cockroaches" and wants to make it 400. Suddenly, Immaculée feels faint, and sees the bathroom as if from above. She can see Jesus above her in "a pool of golden light," holding his arms out to her. Jesus tells her that faith can move mountains, but that faith does not come easily. He asks her to trust in him, assuring her that if she does, she will live.

This is the moment that Immaculée described at the beginning of the book, before she returned to describe her childhood and life story prior to the genocide. It is climactic in multiple ways—not only because it finally seems certain that Immaculée is going to be killed, but also because she achieves a moment of absolute peace, calm, and acceptance through her vision of Jesus.

Immaculée finds herself back in the bathroom, feeling newly calm and powerful. She shouts to the other women that they are safe, and the sound stuns them. However, Immaculée is right: the killers have left. Pastor Murinzi tells the women that the killers almost destroyed the house looking for the women, and then took their anger out on the houseboy, whom the pastor fired. Pastor Murinzi is so nervous about the women being discovered that he rarely brings them food, which makes Immaculée wonder if, after everything, they will starve to death.

Immaculée's calmness and confidence emerges from the fact that she has both accepted death and feels certain, after her vision of Jesus, that she is going to survive. The combination of these beliefs is enormously powerful, particularly in the midst of a genocide that inflicts panic, fear, and dread over the seeming certainty of death.

In early July, a different houseboy becomes insistent about cleaning the bathroom in which the women are hiding. Pastor Murinzi tells him he's cleaned it himself, then says that he's lost the key and doesn't use it anymore. It is obvious that the houseboys know that this is where the women are hiding, and while the pastor is out talking to the French soldiers who have arrived in the area, a houseboy torments the women by trying to peer into the bathroom. However, then Pastor Murinzi returns with the good news that the French soldiers have agreed to accept the women and that he will bring them out of the house in the early hours of the following morning. Yet the pastor also heard that the killers are coming back to search his house either that night or the following morning.

Throughout the book, hope is never straightforward: it is almost always accompanied by ominous signs as well. Just as it looks like the women finally have an escape route out of the bathroom (and the genocide), death also looks even more certain. The fact that they have miraculously lived up until this point but still have no guarantee of survival is torturous. As Immaculée has demonstrated, the only way to get through it is through faith, hope, and trust.

The women braid each other's hair in order to make themselves look as presentable as possible. When they catch sight of themselves in the mirror in Pastor Murinzi's bedroom, they are horrified. Immaculée's weight has gone from 115 to 65 pounds. Pastor Murinzi brings his ten children to look at the women, and some of the children exclaim that they are "Tutsi ghosts." The pastor reminds his children that "there, but for the grace of God, go any of you." Immaculée feels grateful to him and asks God to watch over him. One of the children, Shimwe, gives Immaculée a towel and a sweater, hugs her, and tells her she will pray for her. Immaculée is greatly comforted by this small act of kindness. She and the other women follow the pastor into the night.

While the pastor has not always behaved in a totally upstanding manner, in this moment he emerges as a deeply sympathetic and admirable figure. It is obvious that he shares Immaculée's deep belief that everyone is a child of God. As a result, he has treated the Tutsi women as if they were his own children, and he reminds his children that they are no better than the women who have been forced to hide in the bathroom.

CHAPTER 17: THE PAIN OF FREEDOM

Immaculée is astonished by the feeling of being outside in the fresh air. Most of Pastor Murinzi's sons, along with John, surround the women, carrying weapons to protect them. Suddenly, a group of 60 heavily-armed Interahamwe emerge from the darkness. However, miraculously they pass by the group without incident. Soon after, the pastor indicates that the French camp is 500 yards away and that the women must go the rest of the way themselves. Immaculée quickly shakes his hand and runs to the camp as fast as she can.

Having spent months in the bathroom hiding from the killers, Immaculée now confronts them face-to-face. The fact that they do not notice the group of Tutsi women is miraculous, and recalls other moments in which Immaculée felt that God "blinded" the eyes of the killers, allowing her to escape right in front of them.

Immaculée and the other women shout for help, and a soldier approaches them suspiciously. Immaculée can tell that he is trying to judge from their physical appearance whether they are Tutsi or Hutu. Immaculée is the only one with an identity card, which she presents to the soldier. Suddenly, the soldiers' attitude changes and they promise that everything will be ok, and that the women will not be hurt. Inside the camp, Immaculée walks off alone and lies down on the ground, staring up at the night's sky. She thinks about her family and remembers her childhood swims in Lake Kivu. She is filled with sadness, but tells God that she trusts Him to make a new path for her.

Having spent so long inside the bathroom, Immaculée finds joy in every aspect of the natural world—even something as simple as lying on the dirt floor, staring up at the sky. Yet her sadness when thinking about her memories of Lake Kivu are a reminder that even the natural landscape has been forever tarnished by the genocide.

A man approaches Immaculée, and she soon recognizes him as her friend Jean Paul. He is accompanied by his brother, Jean Baptiste, who has several enormous, fresh wounds on his neck and head. Jean Paul tells Immaculée the good news that Kigali has fallen, but adds that the killing in Kibuye has gotten even worse as a result. Immaculée had always thought Jean Paul and his brother were Hutu, and now Jean Paul explains that their short stature and dark skin helped them survive. He says that he was visiting a Hutu friend, Laurent, when Jean Baptiste and many others were attacked by killers. Laurent hid the brothers, but spent his days murdering Tutsis along with the rest of the killers.

Jean Paul's story about Laurent highlights the complexity of the genocide and the actions it inspired. Rather than being a straightforward division between good and evil, the genocide created conditions under which both enormous good and evil were committed—sometimes by the same person. This proves Immaculée's point that no one is born evil but no one is perfect either. It is therefore important to accept the inevitability of sin while forgiving people for the evil acts they commit.

Immaculée realizes that Jean Paul must know what happened to her family, and she braces herself for the truth. She knows that he will not want to be the one to break the news that her family is dead, so she pretends to know her father died, but asks him where. Jean Paul tells her that Leonard was killed in Kibuye town, likely on April 14th. He'd gone to the government office to ask them to send food to the thousands of refugees in the stadium. Leonard had been close with the prefect of Kibuye, but on this day the prefect ordered soldiers to drag Leonard outside the building and shoot him on the street.

In the end, Leonard's trust and hope in other people did end up getting him killed. This is deeply tragic, but after Immaculée's reflections on trust, faith, and hope, perhaps it was better that Leonard died believing in these things rather than surviving with a hardened, cynical heart. At the same time, Immaculée has also explored the importance of standing up for oneself; self-sacrifice should not be the only way.

Jean Paul then tells Immaculée that Rose was killed a few days before Leonard. He suspects that Laurent was one of those who killed her. Rose had been defending a young man she thought was Damascene; the killers told her if she gave them money they wouldn't kill her. Rose tried to run to borrow money from her friend Murenge, but Murenge turned her away, saying: "We don't help cockroaches here!" Rose was hacked to death by machete, and she was one of the few victims of the genocide who was buried after being murdered.

It is utterly heartbreaking that after a lifetime of serving and supporting others, Rose would be turned away by her former friend in her hour of need. Indeed, even in her final moments Rose was not just looking out for herself but also trying to defend a man she thought was her son. Like Leonard, her kindness and moral righteousness ultimately led to her death.

Jean Paul then explains that Augustine and Vianney were killed in a massacre at the stadium. He adds that Damascene tried to escape to Zaire, and beforehand left all of his papers with his friend Bonn. Jean Paul admits that he heard Bonn "went mad" after Damascene was killed. On hearing this, Immaculée stumbles away, collapses on the ground, and weeps. Jean Paul attempts to comfort her, but she tells him she needs to be alone. Immaculée prays, envisioning the faces of her family and asking God to watch over them.

Although Immaculée suspected that her entire family was killed, hearing it confirmed is too much to bear. This is particularly true when she hears of Damascene's death, due to their special connection. From Jean Paul's description, it also seems as if Damascene may have been closest to escaping the genocide. His intelligence, courage, and close friendships got him close to survival, but in the end they weren't enough.

A couple of hours before dawn, the French soldiers tell Immaculée and the others to climb into the back of a truck. When they reach a Hutu roadblock, the soldiers pretend that they are bringing supplies to Hutu refugees from Kigali, and they are allowed to pass. Many of the refugees are headed to Kibuye, some hoping to escape to Zaire. Immaculée is relieved when the truck reaches the French base camp, but she feels defeated that they are still in Rwanda, as in that moment she would rather be anywhere else.

Escaping the bathroom into the protection of the French soldiers should be a moment of relief, joy, and triumph. However, the tragedy of the genocide is too enormous and pervasive for Immaculée to really feel happy. Furthermore, she now has to confront how alone she truly is and always will be after the deaths of her family members.

Immaculée realizes that they are at the schoolhouse where Rose used to teach, and is briefly comforted by fond memories of her mother. There are about 20 other Tutsis at the camp who had survived by living in the forest for the past three months. Suddenly, Immaculée sees Rose's sister Esperance and runs to embrace her. Esperance brings Immaculée to see her other aunt, Jeanne. Ordinarily Jeanne is an elegant, extremely neat woman, but now she is wearing clothes so worn that they do not cover her. Jeanne apologizes for her appearance, and she and Immaculée embrace.

Once again, in the middle of one of Immaculée's darkest hours a ray of hope and comfort emerges. Immaculée's immediate family members are dead, but her reunion with Jeanne and Esperance shows that at least not all the members of her extended family have been killed. Perhaps there is a chance to rebuild a life post-genocide after all.

The women exchange tragic news about who has been killed in the genocide. Both Jeanne and Esperance lost almost all of their immediate family. Immaculée's grandparents were killed, along with at least seven uncles. The women cry together. Esperance tells Immaculée that Damascene found her in the forest while he was trying to escape to Zaire, and that he gave her a letter to give to Immaculée. The letter is stained with teardrops, and Immaculée walks away to read it alone.

Even the terrible tragedy of Damascene's death contains a small miraculous moment—the fact that he found Esperance in the forest and was able to give her a letter for Immaculée, despite not knowing whether Immaculée was still alive or if she or Esperance would get to see each other again.

CHAPTER 18: A LETTER FROM DAMASCENE

Immaculée opens Damascene's letter and immediately recalls the many letters he sent while they were in school. They were always filled with love, encouragement, joy, and "so much humor." This letter is dated May 6, 1994. It is addressed to Leonard, Rose, Vianney, and Immaculée, but there are parentheses around everyone's name but Immaculée's. In the letter, Damascene says that he knows the family will meet again, and that he is ready for death. Immaculée later learns that midway through writing, Damascene found out that their parents and Vianney had been killed, and that this is why the paper is stained with teardrops. At the end of the letter, Damascene encourages Immaculée to stay strong and signs, "Your brother, who loves you very much!".

The teardrops staining the page represent a physical part of Damascene. Although he is now dead and his soul has left his body, in a way he touches Immaculée through the physical object of the letter. In some ways the fact that Damascene learned about the deaths of his family members before his own death feels like a tragic injustice—would it not have been better for him to die with hope remaining that they were still alive? On the other hand, his letter indicates that knowing about their deaths helped him to accept and embrace his own.

Bonn tried to hide Damascene, but when his family found out, they wanted Damascene dead. One of Bonn's uncles was Buhoro, who Immaculée later learns was one of the most vicious Hutu extremists in Rwanda. Bonn helped Damascene to hide in a hole near Bonn's house for three weeks, and then attempted to smuggle him to a kind Hutu fisherman who promised to take him across Lake Kivu to Zaire. Damascene ended up staying a night with Nsenge, another close friend. Ultimately, it was Nsenge's brother Simoni who betrayed him. Simoni pretended to want to wash Damascene's clothes and, when Damascene was in nothing but his underwear, he found himself surrounded by killers.

Again, good and evil are juxtaposed in disturbingly close proximity. The fact that more than one of Damascene's friends risks everything to try and save him speaks to what an extraordinary, loving person he is. Yet on two occasions, the kindness of his friends is matched by the cruelty of their own family members. Once more, we see that the genocide unveils the good and evil that are both present within humanity.

The killers dragged Damascene into the street and asked about his "pretty sister." Damascene replied that they would never find Immaculée because she is smarter than all of them. As the killers kept taunting Damascene, he smiled at them, telling them it was his day to return to God and that he prays God will forgive them for what they are doing. At this point, one of the killers announced that he wanted to see the brain of someone with a master's degree, and hacked at Damascene's head with his machete. Meanwhile, other killers dismembered Damascene's corpse.

Damascene is murdered in one of the most brutal and humiliating ways possible, but—just as Immaculée is able to disconnect from her physical surroundings—Damascene's relationship with God means that he endures this death with dignity and even joy. Despite everything, Damascene embraces his imminent reunion with God, and thus remains triumphant even as he is killed.

Immaculée later learns that one of the killers who'd been present at Damascene's murder, a former friend of Damascene's named Semahe, wept for days after. He admitted that he could not get the look on Damascene's face out of his mind and felt that it was a grave sin to kill a young man like him. After that murder, he swore never to kill again.

Again, this passage reemphasizes that Damascene is an extraordinary, unique person. The courage and joy he showed in his final moments were so overwhelming they persuaded Semahe to stop killing, a true moment of good triumphing over evil.

CHAPTER 19: CAMP COMFORT

The French base camp is guarded by eight armored vehicles and at least 100 guards. The soldiers apologize for the conditions, but compared to life in the bathroom, the camp is positively luxurious. Furthermore, Immaculée enjoys sleeping outside in nature. Sometimes Hutus assemble at the edges of the camp and peer in, but Immaculée always feels safe. The captain of the troops tells Immaculée that he thinks "France has blood on its hands" because many of the Hutu killers received French training prior to the genocide. He offers to kill those who murdered Immaculée's family, and Immaculée is momentarily tempted. However, she touches Leonard's **rosary** and reminds herself that the killers aren't evil—they have just strayed from God's path.

Immaculée's faith continues to help guide her as she adjusts to a whole new set of extraordinary circumstances. It would be easy for her to become overwhelmed by all the changes, the tragic news of her family's death, and by her own conflicting emotions—and indeed this is why she is momentarily tempted to accept the captain's offer of revenge. However, Immaculée's faith has remained her rock throughout this entire period, and she remains committed to it now.

The captain disagrees with Immaculée, so she asks God to show him the importance of forgiveness. She is sure that only God's forgiveness will repair Rwanda after everything that has happened. One day, a man enters the camp claiming to be a genocide survivor, but after interrogation he confesses that he is actually an Interahamwe spy. Immaculée believes the captain orders him to be killed. Immaculée, meanwhile, spends time caring for her aunts. She finds it difficult to be with the women from the bathroom, as the memories evoked by seeing them are so painful. Every day, more Tutsi survivors arrive at the camp. Immaculée hears harrowing stories, but also makes some close friends.

Again, in this passage hope and sorrow, light and darkness, and good and evil are juxtaposed in an extreme way. Immaculée remains peaceful and calm because of her faith in God and in the importance of forgiveness, but tensions, cruelty, and violence are still rife all around her. Immaculée focuses on being a positive force at the camp, but she acknowledges her limitations, accepting the fact that some things—like spending time with the women from the bathroom—are simply too difficult for her.

One of the survivors, Florence, tells Immaculée that she hid in a chapel with hundreds of other Tutsis, who were then attacked by killers. Florence was struck by a machete and woke up in a truck filled with corpses, squashed between the bodies of her parents and sister. When a killer saw her moving, he stabbed her with a spear. She was then thrown off a cliff along with the corpses. She believes the only reason she survived is because God must have had a special reason to spare her. Immaculée agrees, and tells Florence that she is writing down her story. She says that they have both been "left to tell."

One might expect that on hearing a story as horrific as Florence's, Immaculée would try to forget or not think about it. Instead, she records it. This shows that she is beginning to act on the path that she believes God has set in front of her. She and Florence both find comfort and strength in the idea that they were spared for a reason, helping them to keep going and not be overwhelmed by pain.

One of the French soldiers, Pierre, becomes particularly fond of Immaculée. Pierre is kind, and asks if Immaculée has a boyfriend. She tells him the sad story about John, and the two begin spending lots of time together. One day, Pierre confesses his love to her. Immaculée gently tells him that at the moment, she is too sad to be in love; her heart is completely dedicated to God. Pierre tells her he wants to take care of her, but Immaculée insists that the timing is wrong. Pierre sadly accepts this, kisses Immaculée, and leaves.

Although Pierre's love appears to be well-intentioned and genuine, there is something disturbing about the fact that he falls in love with Immaculée when she is at such an extremely vulnerable point in her life. Not only is she wracked by grief and trauma, but she is physically weak as a result of her months in the bathroom. Pierre's love therefore cannot help but seem somewhat predatory.

Immaculée is desperate to talk to Aimable, who is still in Senegal. By the end of July, the war is still continuing in the east and south of Rwanda. There are now almost 150 Tutsi survivors at the camp. Some have lost limbs and have badly infected wounds, and others have gone mad from grief and horror. Immaculée is heartbroken by the number of orphans, many of whom have witnessed their parents be murdered. She speaks to two young brothers who are too young to understand that their parents are not coming back. Immaculée is devastated to realize that most of their relatives are likely dead. She promises herself that one day, she will help the children orphaned by the genocide.

Immaculée also finds strength in remembering that, despite everything she has gone through, she is still in a far better position than the children who have been left orphaned by the genocide, and has a duty to care for these children. Rather than being a burden, the ability to care gives Immaculée a sense of purpose and meaning, thereby strengthening and empowering her.

By August, the camp is too full, so a new, indoor camp is established in Kibuye town. Immaculée ensures that the young orphans, as well as her family members, are taken to the new camp, but she stays behind along with about 30 other refugees to serve as a translator. A woman in a wheelchair with a loud laugh arrives, and Immaculée soon learns that she is Aloise, who is something of a celebrity in the local area. Aloise had polio as a child, but excelled in school. She developed an enormous social and professional network and bought a Hutu identity card years back in order to be able to do work for the government.

Aloise overcame great adversity before the genocide even began, and Immaculée's description of her life remind readers that the lessons Immaculée learned during the genocide apply in other situations as well. Immaculée survived through a combination of resilience, hard work, and study, and this was how Aloise managed to thrive, as well.

Aloise recognizes Immaculée immediately because of her resemblance to her parents, and begins to cry as she recalls her close friendship with Leonard and Rose. Aloise says that Rose "saved" her by paying for her school fees when her parents were too poor to do so. She calls Rose "a saint." She then says that she believes Rose's spirit brought her there in order to pay the debt she owes to Immaculée's family. Aloise admitted that, though she was "legally" Hutu, her husband and children were Tutsi. She and the children fled Kigali during the genocide, leaving her husband, Fari, hiding in the ceiling of their house. She tells Immaculée that once the fighting is over, she will take her back to Kigali to live with her as a daughter.

Immaculée's family may be dead, but they still have a strong presence in the story. Damascene "speaks" to Immaculée through the letter and "touches" her through his teardrops. Rose, meanwhile, continues to protect and support Immaculée through the ongoing effects of her acts of kindness. In this sense, Immaculée's family truly do live through all those who they knew, loved, and helped.

Immaculée thanks Aloise, but does not completely trust her. She says that she has grown close to people in the camp and doesn't want to leave them. Aloise laughs and offers to welcome all nine of them to her home, as well. After thinking it over, Immaculée returns to Aloise the next day and agrees. Aloise jokes that she is doing it for Rose, not for Immaculée.

After so many months of hardship and tragedy, it is perhaps unsurprising that Immaculée finds it difficult to trust Aloise's act of absolute kindness and generosity. However, regaining this ability to trust is an important part of rebuilding her life.

CHAPTER 20: THE ROAD TO THE REBELS

In late August, the captain tells Immaculée that they have two hours to evacuate the camp and that the refugees will be brought to stay with Tutsi soldiers at their camp nearby. Immaculée gathers her few meagre belongings, but on second thought decides she wants to have a completely fresh start and leaves them behind, hoping another survivor will find them. She says goodbye to Pierre, who gives her his address in France and says he will pray that God keeps her safe. In the truck on the way to the RPF camp, they pass a group of Interahamwe, and Immaculée once again has to pray that they pass by safely.

Immaculée's decision to leave her few belongings behind again highlights the disconnection from the physical world she has achieved through her intense relationship with God. While on a practical level it might not be the most prudent thing to rid herself of belongings (meagre as they may be), Immaculée prioritizes the symbolic cleansing that will come with this gesture, rather than making practical considerations.

Shortly after, the captain says that there have been reports of gunfire in the area and that the survivors will have to get out and walk the rest of the way. Immaculée begs him not to, but he says he must follow his orders. Feeling dizzy with fear, Immaculée tells the others that they must get out. As she leaves the truck, she comes face-to-face with a killer and looks straight into his eyes. She can see that he doesn't really want to kill; she clutches her **rosary** and tries her hardest to send a message of God's love to the man. He eventually drops his machete, but other killers remain standing nearby.

Although it is extremely frightening to do so, here Immaculée manages to do the unthinkable and directly confront one of the killers. Indeed, this confrontation is so powerful that, against all odds, it makes the killer drop his machete. Of course, Immaculée does not believe that she is alone in her confrontation—instead, she makes herself a conductor of God's love, allowing herself to be a tool of a much greater power.

The others get out of the truck and the Interahamwe begin taunting them, saying that while they might have had the protection of the French soldiers before, they are alone now. Immaculée tells the others that they will walk to the RPF camp, and on hearing "RPF" the killers become nervous. The group walk, but the road is too strewn with bodies for Aloise's wheelchair to get far. Along with Jean Paul and another friend, she decides to walk to the RPF and come back for Aloise and the others. She tells the group being left behind to pray and promises they will be back with help soon.

Once again, Immaculée shows enormous bravery that sets her apart from others, especially considering her disproportionate vulnerability as a woman. She has already survived so much, yet her life continues to hang in a precarious balance. Despite this, her faith in God is so strong that it allows her to act with enormous calmness and courage.

As Immaculée walks, she realizes that she truly is walking in the "valley of death," and prays fiercely. One Interahamwe recognizes her, saying "I know this cockroach" and identifying her as Leonard's daughter. Immaculée puts herself in God's hands, knowing that only He can save her. Moments later, the Interahamwe are gone. Soon after, Immaculée is thrilled to see the RPF base camp in front of her. However, just she is beginning to feel relief, one of the soldiers cocks his gun and points it directly at her.

Immaculée's desire to live has not exactly diminished, but at the same time she has had so many brushes with death that she no longer fears dying and refuses the psychic struggle of hoping to live. Instead, she completely surrenders herself to God and accepts whatever fate He has planned for her.

CHAPTER 21: ON TO KIGALI

Immaculée stares at the Tutsi soldier pointing his gun at her and tells God that it is up to Him whether she lives or dies. She begins explaining that French soldiers brought them to the camp, but the soldier tells her to stop speaking and lie on the ground. He cannot believe that so many Tutsis are alive, and insists they must be Hutu spies. Just as Immaculée begins praying for Aloise on the others who she left by the road, she hears someone say her name. It is Bazil, a Hutu neighbor who'd joined the Tutsi rebels. Bazil had been Rose's favorite student; now, he and Immaculée embrace. Bazil explains to the other soldiers that Immaculée is telling the truth and isn't a spy. Immediately, the soldiers agree to go and help the friends Immaculée left behind.

Once again, Rose remains present via the people whose lives she touched. The enormous network of people who love and feel indebted to Rose shows how kindness spreads further kindness. This is an important lesson in the midst of so much cruelty and destruction. A single act of kindness is valuable not only in its own right, but also for its potential to stimulate even more kindness, thereby significantly contributing to making the world a better place.

Immaculée and Bazil immediately begin catching up, and when Bazil asks after Rose, he still calls her "Teacher." With a heavy heart, Immaculée tells Bazil that her family, along with almost every Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Mataba, are all dead. Bazil's own parents, four brothers, and three sisters are dead, and in this moment he breaks down in tears. When Aloise is safely brought to the camp, she tells Immaculée to keep saying the prayers she has been saying, because they worked to miraculously save the group from the Interahamwe. Aloise embraces her two children and announces that they have survived the genocide. She thanks God, as does Immaculée.

The story of Bazil shows the enormous sacrifice made by Hutus who chose to support and defend Tutsis. Bazil may be Hutu, but his family were slaughtered just as many Tutsis were. This makes it less surprising that so many Hutus joined in killing Tutsis. They knew that their own lives and the lives of their families were on the line.

Aloise's cheerfulness is infectious, and raises the mood at the RPF camp. Immaculée speaks with the leader of the camp, Major Ntwali, who asks if she blames him and other RPF soldiers for the genocide. Immaculée assures him that she doesn't, and that the evil of the genocide is the work of the devil. She talks about forgiving the killers, but Major Ntwali is not inclined to forgive. He directs her to a Baptist church where other about 100 other survivors are being sheltered. There are no beds or blankets, but Immaculée is happy to be in a house of God.

It is clear by now that Immaculée is unusual in her willingness to forgive. While others around her have also acted in extraordinarily kind and self-sacrificial ways, forgiving the killers is a step too far for most of them. Immaculée is thus once again left alone—this time because she is seemingly the only person around who wants to forgive.

Immaculée tries to cook food for the group but has to stop because she is sickened by a hideous smell. Bazil leads her behind the church and shows her a pile of hundreds of dead bodies piled on top of each other. Next to it is a pit filled with thousands more corpses. Immaculée vomits, reeling from what she has seen. She doesn't understand how Rwanda will ever heal from this horror. Immaculée decides that in order to help others as God intends for her to do, she will have to leave Rwanda for a while. This can't happen immediately, however, because she has no job, home, or money—not even any belongings except the clothes she is wearing and Leonard's **rosary**.

Immaculée's financial concerns bring home the fact that even though she has survived the genocide, she must now deal with a far more ordinary yet no less significant form of survival: ensuring that she has a home and enough food to eat. The circumstances around her are so surreal that it would be easy to allow herself to get disorientated, but she remains steadfastly focused on the future.

Immaculée and the others want to leave the camp for Aloise's house in Kigali, but at first there seems no way to make this happen. However, Major Ntwali then offers to drive the whole group "right to Aloise's front door" and give them enough food to last for months. In Kigali, Major Ntwali warns the group to be careful walking, because there are land mines everywhere. Aloise asks for them to be dropped off at the UN, which is a 15 minute walk from her house. She reasons that if Fari has survived, he will have come to the UN because it is the safest place in Kigali. She prays that he is alive because she doesn't know what she would do without him.

In the aftermath of genocide, Immaculée finds herself surrounded by more and more acts of goodwill. The kindness of people such as Aloise and Major Ntwali remind her of the good within humanity and provide hope that she may have a bright future after all. On the other hand, it is easy for these acts of kindness to be overwhelmed by the chaos and devastation surrounding her.

Happily, the group arrive at the UN to find that Fari is there and alive. He embraces Aloise and his children, but when he asks after their baby Aloise tells him that she died from a fever. The two parents sob together; Immaculée is shocked, as she didn't even know that Aloise had lost a child. Like his wife, Fari tells Immaculée that she resembles her parents, and reiterates Aloise's offer for her to live with them.

Out of many strong characters in the book, Aloise appears to be the strongest by far—apart from Immaculée. The examples set by these women demonstrate that hope, courage, and happiness are possible even under the very worst circumstances.

Aloise and Fari's home has been heavily damaged, but the group works together to repair it and soon it is in a good state again. Immaculée is thrilled to sleep in a real bed for the first time since she fled her parents' house. Because they don't have any possessions or money, the group searches abandoned homes, gathering clothes to wear. Immaculée takes a pair of gold earrings as a treat, but balks on seeing her reflection. She thinks of the woman who owns the earrings and feels "like a trespasser in another person's life." She returns the earrings to where she found them. At this point she realizes it is time to get a job.

This passage suggests that, in both a literal and metaphorical sense, rebuilding Rwanda will only be possible through cooperation and mutual support. The grueling task of repairing Aloise and Fari's home, for example, becomes easy and joyous because it is done by a group of refugees together. The group continues to find strength, hope, and inspiration in one another.

CHAPTER 22: THE LORD'S WORK

Kigali is so devastated that Immaculée finds it hard to believe she will find work. She asks Fari, who tells her the UN is likely the only option—but that she will need to speak English. Immaculée suddenly realizes that the vision she had in the bathroom is coming true. She washes her clothes, prays, and stays up all night practicing her English phrases in the mirror. The next morning, she travels to the UN and is greeted by a friendly Ghanaian guard. She believes he is speaking English but has no idea what he is saying. She responds: "How do you do? My name is Immaculée Ilibagiza. I am looking for a job." The guard clearly has no idea what she is trying to say, but after learning she is Rwandan he switches to French. He points her to a waiting room, where she waits all day.

Immaculée's first attempts to speak English and get a job at the UN are tragicomic. There is something distinctly sweet, endearing, and humorous about the determination with which she speaks English. Of course, it is totally unsurprising that she is incomprehensible, considering that she taught herself the language silently in a bathroom using only two books. At the same time, this scene is also a serious reminder of God's power and the prescience of Immaculée's vision.

At the end of the day, Immaculée is told that there aren't any jobs. Yet she remains determined, and returns to the waiting room every day for two weeks. At this point, she begins to lose hope. Aloise's house is too noisy for proper prayer and contemplation, and Immaculée even finds herself missing the bathroom for the opportunities it afforded for deep, uninterrupted connection with God. Nonetheless, Immaculée prays to God to help her get a job at the UN, saying she knows that this is His plan for her. She begins to visualize herself getting the job, and to think about what she will need to do after she does.

Again, the lessons of the genocide apply in situations far different than the genocide itself. Just as Immaculée entrusted her survival to the miraculous power of God, so does she now trust that God will make a way for her to get a job at the UN, despite the apparent unlikeliness of this plan working out.

Immaculée realizes that she will need her high school diploma and documentation demonstrating her university attendance, all of which are in her dorm room in Butare. Yet Butare is four hours' drive away and she has no idea how she will get there. At this moment, Immaculée hears her name being called. It is Dr. Abel, a professor of medicine from her old university. He remarks on how thin she is and invites her to come and live with him in Butare. Immaculée explains that she has a place to live but that she would love a lift to the city, and Dr. Abel replies that he is planning to leave tomorrow. Immaculée realizes that once again, God has answered her prayers and provided a solution to her problems.

Just as Christian doctrine teaches, God does appear in many forms in Immaculée's life. Sometimes, it is the form of an idea or vision, at other times it is in the form of "blinding" or subduing the killers, and at other times it is in the form of a person who is perfectly positioned to help Immaculée. In each of these examples, Immaculée is reminded not only of God's power, but also of His pervasive presence. She is never alone, because He is everywhere.

When Dr. Abel drops her at the university, she is told that the campus is "off limits indefinitely" and that she should go back to Kigali. Immaculée stands at the roadside and prays, holding Leonard's **rosary**. Soon after, a colonel approaches her and takes pity on her, mistaking her for a child due to her extremely low weight. He agrees to accompany her to her dorm room. The campus is unrecognizable and is still strewn with bodies. Immaculée does not look closely in case they are any of her beloved friends. Everything in Immaculée's dorm room has been stolen except some pictures of her parents, which she gratefully takes from the wall.

The National University, which was once a paradise on Earth to Immaculée, has now been left apocalyptic and hellish. This confirms that nothing about Immaculée's life will ever go back to the way it once was. Even if she is able to rebuild her life in the way she hopes and trusts she can, the loss of her former world is irrevocable.

The colonel grabs some of Immaculée's letters and suspiciously demands: "Who's Aimable?". Immaculée explains that he is her brother, studying in Senegal. At that moment, she spots an envelope on the floor containing her high school diploma, university progress report, and $30 of her scholarship money. Immaculée is thrilled—not only is she now "rich," but she has documents to prove her education. She uses $1 to pay for a taxi back to Kigali, and then purchases clothes, shoes, perfume, and deodorant. She also gets her hair done for the first time in months.

Immaculée is rewarded for enduring the trial of returning to the university. The documents and money she retrieves not only help in a practical way to prepare her for life after the genocide—they also confirm that the life she had before was real. This is particularly important given the surreal, disorientating, and traumatizing way in which Immaculée's world has been turned upside down.

The next day Immaculée returns to the UN, where the guard does not even recognize her. She introduces herself to the personnel director and explains that she is looking for a job. He asks if she is trying to say she needs a job, before switching to French. The personnel director directs Immaculée to his secretary, who is suspicious of her and tells her that they won't have any openings for the next three or four months. Immaculée walks away crying, but as she is leaving a middle-aged man stops her. He hands her his business card and tells her to come back at 10am the following morning. His card identifies him as Pierre Mehu, a spokesman for UNAMIR. UNAMIR had been established prior to the genocide in order to improve the Rwandan government.

Again, just as Immaculée is brought to the brink of all-consuming despair, a miracle occurs and gives her hope again. Pierre Mehu is a stranger, and thus it is strange and inexplicable that he should show such sudden and unwarranted kindness to her. Of course, Immaculée believes that such things are miracles from God. An additional interpretation might be that Immaculée's own goodness and kindness creates a kind of magnetism to which people naturally respond.

The next day, Mr. Mehu reveals that he mistook Immaculée for a young woman he was close to who had been killed in the genocide. He takes a liking to Immaculée and promises to get her a job, adding that the UN will be her new "home" and he her father figure. Mr. Mehu's secretary gives Immaculée intensive lessons in secretarial skills, and soon after Immaculée passes the UN typing test with a perfect score. She is soon given a job as a clerk, tracking the foreign supplies coming to Rwanda via the UN. Immaculée cannot believe that only a few months previously, she had been teetering on the brink of death in the bathroom.

Many people in this part of the book offer to serve as surrogate family members to Immaculée. This is an important part not only of Immaculée's personal story, but also the story of Rwanda as a whole. With so many families and communities destroyed and people left orphaned by the genocide, it is necessary to expand the concept of family and create new kinship relations with people who may previously have been total strangers.

Immaculée loves her job, meeting new people, and improving her English. She is also happy to receive a paycheck, which helps her to financially support her aunts and give back to Aloise. In early October, all her friends from the camp had left Aloise's house. Over a million Tutsis who'd left Rwanda during the 1959 and 1973 massacres have returned to the country, shaping it into a different place. Meanwhile, over two million Hutus had left, many to refugee camps in other countries. Surrounded by ongoing turmoil and suffering, Immaculée decides that she needs to move on and find a new home.

One of the skills that helps Immaculée to survive both during and after the genocide is her willingness to embrace change. Many people find change frightening, and would rather stay even in bad situations in order to avoid confronting the unknown. However, due to her confidence in herself and her faith in God, Immaculée does not shy away from change but rather rushes toward it.

Soon after, Immaculée's university roommate, Sarah, arrives at Aloise's house, weeping with joy to find Immaculée alive. Immaculée sobs as she tells Sarah how Augustine and Vianney died together. Immaculée decides to move in with Sarah, who lives only five minutes away from Aloise. Immaculée is thrilled to live with Sarah's parents, who are very devout Christians. Immaculée realizes that it is finally time for her to write to Aimable, a task she has delayed because of the unbearable sorrow it will bring them both. She puts Leonard's **rosary** on the table beside her and begins to write "the saddest letter I have ever written."

Immaculée constantly invokes the presence of her dead family members, who remain alive to her in various different ways and forms. Ironically, she has remained distant from her actual living family member. Indeed, there is an extent to which it is easier for her to communicate with her dead loved ones because she believes they are at peace. Communicating with Aimable inevitably means causing him to suffer, which is the last thing Immaculée wants.

CHAPTER 23: BURYING THE DEAD

At the UN, Immaculée is continually reminded of her trauma and sorrow. One day, a Senegalese officer named Colonel Gueye tells her he can escort her to Kibuye so she can visit her surviving relatives. Two weeks later, Immaculée and Sarah are taken by helicopter back to her home province. In the helicopter, Immaculée remembers all the times she'd wished she was a bird, flying free above it all. Now she gazes at the country below and is filled with sadness.

This passage explores the problem of survivor's guilt. Immaculée has achieved the freedom she craved in a far more literal way than she could have imagined, as she is actually flying like a bird! However, she could not have anticipated the level of sadness that comes with being one of the few who survives death and gets to once again to taste freedom.

Aimable does not have enough money to visit Rwanda, but Immaculée assures him that he will honor their parents by completing his studies despite everything that has happened. Colonel Gueye leaves Immaculée and Sarah under the protection of a kind man named Captain Traore. The captain tells Immaculée that he fears for her safety; although the genocide may be over, the area is still afflicted with tension. As a result, he sends over twenty soldiers and five armored vehicles to escort Immaculée back to Mataba. Immaculée feels proud to be traveling with so much support, but overwhelmed with sorrow on returning home.

The more time passes after the end of the genocide, the more kindness and support Immaculée encounters. This helps her to get through the harrowing period of processing her own grief and trauma. It also provides hope for the future of Rwanda. While there may still be tensions in Kibuye, the presence of so many kind people suggests that love may indeed conquer hate in the long run.

Immaculée's family home has been completely destroyed. Her few surviving Tutsi neighbors show her where Rose and Damascene were hastily buried. Hearing the details of how her family members died fills Immaculée with anger. She feels an urge to destroy the whole of Mataba and curses the killers, calling them "animals." That night, Immaculée feels totally alone. Her angry, vengeful thoughts distance her from God, whom she calls her "truest friend."

Immaculée knows that the only way she will be able to achieve peace and happiness is through forgiveness, but sometimes it is simply too difficult for her to enact her principles. She needs time to let out her feelings, even if this time is spent miserable and alone.

Eventually, Immaculée manages to pray to God to forgive the killers. She asks to help and forgive them. At this moment, she feels at peace, even as she remains desperately sad. It is a huge relief to be free from hatred and vengefulness. Immaculée is hopeful about the international tribunal being established by the UN, but also wants to ensure that there is room for forgiveness. When she stops praying, she hears music. The soldiers at the camp are having a party, and she and Sarah watch happily as they dance all night.

It might seem crazy that Immaculée and Sarah are able to participate in a party after confronting the ultimate devastation and trauma that comes through returning to Mataba. However, the sense of joy and peace Immaculée has achieved through forgiveness allows her to let go of her own grief and be happy with others.

The next day Immaculée visits Jeanne and Esperance, who are doing far better than when she last saw them. A group of Tutsi survivors and Hutu friends assemble for Rose and Damascene's reburial. When they dig up Damascene's body, Esperance tells Immaculée not to look, but she looks anyway, and ends up fainting. After this, she realizes it would be better if she did not see her mother's remains. Many of the survivors admit that not only have they lost their family, community, and possessions, but they have also lost their faith. Immaculée feels grateful that, despite everything she's lost, she still has her religion. She tells Sarah it is time for them to return "home" to Kigali.

Immaculée's eventual realization that it is better not to look at the dead bodies of her relatives carries significance beyond this particular moment. Throughout the book, Immaculée pushes herself to extreme lengths, putting her own courage and mental stability to the test. Here, she remembers the importance of acknowledging her limits and protecting herself from further trauma where possible.

CHAPTER 24: FORGIVING THE LIVING

Back in Kigali, Immaculée is still tormented by nightmares and sadness. One night, she has a dream that she is in a helicopter flying over her parents' house. She sees her family members standing in the sky. Damascene is smiling, and tells her that she has been sad for too long and promises her that they are all happy. Immaculée joyously promises him that when God decides it is time, she will come join them in heaven. Her family slowly disappears, and Immaculée remains flying freely above Rwanda. Immaculée is so happy that she begins singing a song in Kinyarwanda. The lyrics mean: "Thank You, God, for love that is beyond our understanding."

This passage adds another dimension to the symbolism of birds and helicopters. These symbols are not only important because they connote freedom, but also because they represent nearness to heaven. Immaculée is greatly comforted by the knowledge that her family is in heaven and that she will return to them someday. She knows that she is not alone, and this gives her freedom to pursue a life of happiness and service while she is still on Earth.

Following this night, Immaculée's pain eases, even as she continues to desperately miss her family. She feels assured that her family is at peace, and she realizes that she must return to Mataba. Once again, Colonel Gueye accompanies her. Aunt Jeanne tells Immaculée that she is buying a gun so she will be ready "next time," which makes Immaculée's heart heavy. Immaculée kneels by Rose and Damascene's graves and tells them about her new life in Kigali, crying tears of relief.

Again, it is sometimes easier for Immaculée to communicate with her family than with those around her. While Immaculée and the other survivors' lives were spared, there is a sense in which her family was "saved," as they were able to return to God and avoid confronting the horrors of the genocide and its aftermath.

A friend of Leonard's named Semana, who is "like an uncle" to Immaculée, is now the regional mayor in charge of Kibuye. He is responsible for arresting the killers, and knows better than anyone who committed the murders in the area. At the prison, he asks Immaculée if she wants to meet the leader of the gang who killed Rose and Damascene, and Immaculée replies that she does. The murderer, Felicien, was a successful Hutu businessman. Immaculée had been friends with his children and remembered him as elegant, handsome, and charming.

Felicien's backstory challenges the usual reasons people have for forgiving those who commit crimes. Often, people will point to the fact that criminals were impoverished, disempowered, and traumatized themselves—yet Felicien was privileged, wealthy, and charming. In this sense, he is an especially difficult figure to forgive.

In the prison cell, Semana demands that Felicien explain to Immaculée why he killed her mother and brother. Felicien is bent over, wearing tattered clothing and barely recognizable. He is too ashamed to meet Immaculée's gaze, and she feels a deep sense of pity for him. He begins to cry, and Immaculée touches his hands. Looking him in the eye, she tells him that she forgives him. This astonishes and infuriates Semana, who asks Immaculée how she could have forgiven him. Immaculée replies: "Forgiveness is all I have to offer."

Immaculée does a remarkable job in truly making Felicien appear pitiful. She reveals that she does not need to add to his suffering, as he is already in so much pain. Trying to make him suffer more would be pointless; it would not make her parents come back or make herself feel any better. Instead, she wants to love and support Felicien like all people, and the only way she can do that is by forgiving him.

EPILOGUE: NEW LOVE, NEW LIFE

Over the next two years, Immaculée leads a "quiet, reflective life." She works at the UN and lives with Sarah's family, and in her spare time she volunteers at an orphanage. In 1995 Aimable returns to Rwanda. At first brother and sister find it hard to even meet each other's eyes. They have dinner with friends at a restaurant and joke around together. However, that night Immaculée sobs alone in bed. The next day is easier, and Immaculée feels that they have silently agreed not to discuss what happened to their family. Eventually Aimable qualifies as a veterinarian and moves to Kigali, where he still lives. He is now married with a child. He and Immaculée write to each other at least once a week, and never speak about their family in the past tense in order to "keep their memory alive."

In some ways Immaculée and Aimable's survival is a happy aspect of the story. At the same time, their relationship also speaks to the irrevocable trauma and pain that they will never escape. Although they remain close, their grief is so strong that they cannot even bear to discuss it. Both of them must disconnect from the reality of their family's death in order to keep going—yet their mutual decision to do so also constitutes a hope founded in love and support.

Immaculée spends many hours at her local Jesuit center in Kigali, and during her prayers she asks God to send her a husband. She visualizes a strong, kind, deeply ethical man who loves children and God. She doesn't mind what race or nationality the man is, but asks that he is Catholic because she loves Catholicism and wants to be able to worship in the same way as her husband. Three months later, Immaculée meets the man she imagined. His name is Bryan Black, and he is an American who also works for the UN and arrives in Rwanda to help set up the International Criminal Tribunal.

This passage contains another extraordinary example of the power of positive visualization and prayer. Another important dimension of Immaculée's quest for a husband that she does not explicitly mention is the fact that she refused to settle for anyone less than perfect for her. She could have married John or Pierre, but she waited because she believed that God had someone perfect in store—and she was right.

Immaculée and Bryan's first date is wonderful, and she feels that they are a "perfect match." Nervously, she asks about his religion, and when he replies that he is Catholic she feels sure that he is the man with whom she will spend the rest of her life. Two years later, the two marry in a traditional Rwandan ceremony. In 1998, they move to America. They now have two children, Nikeisha and Bryan, Jr. After her children are born, Immaculée gets a job at the UN headquarters in Manhattan. She returns to Rwanda often and at the time of writing is setting up a foundation to help genocide survivors all over the world.

Although Immaculée's life is completely different from what it was before the genocide, there are some similarities. Her hard work and intelligence continue to pay off, and she secures important and meaningful work. Meanwhile, her kindness and devotion to family allow her to build a new family for herself. This may all take place in a country and context she could never have imagined in advance, yet it nonetheless feels like the natural conclusion of Immaculée's story.

Immaculée insists that the message of forgiveness is relevant to people the world over. Many people, including survivors of the Rwandan genocide, find it extraordinarily difficult to forgive others. However, many people have told Immaculée that it is an enormous relief when they are eventually able to forgive. Immaculée meets a Holocaust survivor who says Immaculée's story inspired her to forgive those who killed her parents, which has finally allowed her to let go of her anger. A 92-year-old women confesses to Immaculée that she always thought it was "too late" to forgive, but now happily realizes there is no such thing.

Immaculée is emphatic that the fact that forgiveness is difficult does not mean it is wrong or impossible. Rather, the difficulty of compelling oneself to forgive belies the peace, happiness, and relief that comes when one is actually able to do so. This is why Immaculée focuses on sharing the importance of forgiveness with others, because she understands it is difficult to believe in the possibility of forgiveness on one's own.

Immaculée explains that in Rwanda, killers are being released from prison and reintegrated into their communities. Through the power of forgiveness, she believes that Rwanda can be a "paradise" again. She insists that "the love of a single heart can make a world of difference" and hopes that her story helps to heal the world by healing the hearts of individuals.

This passage introduces another way in which Immaculée believes in the importance of individuals. Not only is each human valuable as a child of God, but each human also has the capacity to enact enormous positive change.

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