The Ruined Bride of Velvet Nights by Brick Moving Ant

Chapter 65

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- Joseph and I started dating, but our demanding jobs meant we rarely had time to see each other.
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- Most of our encounters took place in war-torn regions—he'd be rushing to treat the wounded, while I'd be in the operating room, fighting to save lives.
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- A fleeting touch as we brushed past each other was often the only connection we shared.
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- The patchy network signal didn't help either; Days would pass without hearing from each other, but then, out of nowhere, my phone would buzz nonstop as messages flooded in. They were disorganized, chaotic, as if they too had braved gunfire and destruction, but they carried the weight of longing and steadfast affection.
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- The situation in North Kivu grew increasingly dire.
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- Our first argument happened on the day a village near Goma was attacked.
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- When we arrived, the armed militants hadn't fully retreated, and the security forces were still exchanging fire with them.
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- We rushed back to the vehicle, preparing to evacuate, but Joseph suddenly jumped out of the ambulance.
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- There, at the edge of the battlefield, lay a collapsed villager.
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- Joseph hoisted the man onto his back and carried him to safety, his own body cut and bleeding from shrapnel.
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- I was furious and terrified, yelling at him, "Are you trying to get yourself killed?"
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- But he stood his ground. "I'm a doctor! I couldn't just leave him there! His leg was injured, but he could've survived. If I didn't save him, he would've died for sure!"
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- I knew he was right, and I knew it was his duty to save lives.
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- But when he returned covered in blood—so much blood I couldn't tell which was his and which
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- wasn't—my composure crumbled.
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- After trembling through a frantic examination and realizing his injuries were only superficial, I broke down, clutching him as I sobbed.
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- "Joseph! I can't lose anyone else! If something happened to you, what would I do?"
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- He stood there silently for a moment before wrapping his arms around me, his voice hoarse.
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- "I'm sorry… I promise I'll be more careful. I won't put myself in danger, and I won't make you worry
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- anymore."
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- Still crying, I buried my face in his chest. "You have to promise!"
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- "Alright, let's make a pinky swear," he said, taking my hand.
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- "Pinky swear, whoever breaks it will turn into a puppy!"
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- I couldn't help but laugh through my tears. "If you really turn into a puppy, how would I introduce you to my mom?"
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- "Your puppy boyfriend?" he teased, grinning.
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- I threw a pillow at him in frustration. He lay still, pretending to be dead. Panicked, I quickly pulled the pillow away, only to see his sly smile and perfectly fine face.
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- His expression seemed to say: See? I'm not that easy to kill.
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- I glared at him until my eyes stung and blurred with fresh tears.
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- At that moment, I realized how precious every single day with Joseph truly was.
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- As the chaos of war escalated, the Ebola virus began its relentless assault on this already devastated
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- country.
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- By spring, Joseph was even busier. With a severe shortage of medical staff, he shuttled back and forth between refugee camps and the Ebola treatment center.
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- Then, armed groups launched sudden attacks on treatment centers in several cities. Many doctors were forced to abandon their posts and evacuate immediately. But Joseph refused to leave.
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- On one hand, the situation in Goma was still relatively stable. On the other hand, nearly a hundred patients remained in the center. If everyone left, those patients would have no choice but to wait for
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- death in their beds.
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- Joseph and four other doctors decided to stay and adapt to the situation as if unfolded.
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- However, the crisis quickly worsened. Armed groups occupied the outskirts of Goma, cutting off all routes in and out. We were trapped in the city.
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- Amid this tense situation, Joseph suddenly sent me a message, asking me to come to the treatment center. He didn't explain much, but I had a bad feeling,
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- After suiting up in protective gear, we entered the medical waste disposal area. Inside an empty room that had been temporarily cleared out, I saw a group of Hutu children—over ten of them. They had escaped from the mountains, the oldest no more than twelve years old.
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- Their clothes were tattered, their bodies covered in infected wounds. I couldn't believe my eyes.
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- The armed groups occupying the outskirts were Tutsis, and the Tutsis had a deep-seated blood feud with the Hutus. If these children were discovered, not only would they be doomed, but the entire

treatment center could also face destruction.

I was overwhelmed and shouted at Joseph:

"Joseph, are you insane?! Do you even remember the principles of Doctors Without Borders?!"

He wasn't supposed to get directly involved in the conflict. Only by maintaining neutrality could he help the most people.

But he simply hung his head, his voice low. "I know this is dangerous, which is why I wanted to ask

if you could reach out to an organization that can take these children in."

"How are you going to get them out of Goma? There are patrols everywhere!" I asked, almost in

despair.

Joseph's words came fast: "They're small; they can wear protective suits and hide inside medical

waste bins.

The disposal trucks come every three days, and no one ever checks those bins. As long as someone is ready to receive them on the other side, we can save their lives!"

I was stunned by the audacity of his plan, momentarily at a loss for words.

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He clenched his fists and said with unwavering determination:

"Zoey, I am a human being first, a doctor second, and a member of Doctors Without Borders last.

I cannot stand by and let these children be thrown out to die!"

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