

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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ECLIPSE

Everyone has something to hide.

PROLOGUE

The Devil's Light

IN A WEST AFRICAN VILLAGE, MARISSA BRAND OKARI WATCHED HER husband prepare to risk his life for the act of speaking out.

It was night. Hundreds of villagers, old and young, gathered in the center of town, their faces illuminated less by moonlight than by the huge orange flame that spewed out of the vertical stem thrusting from an oil pipeline. Torchlike, the stem backlit the line of palms behind the village, its thick residue of smoke blackening the air, its roar a constant ominous presence. Every day in the life of any villager under thirty, this terrible eruption—the flaring of gas from the oil extracted by PetroGlobal Luan-dia from beneath the deep-red clay—had never ceased, its searing, poi-sonous heat denuding trees, killing birds and animals, and turning the rainfall to acid, which corroded the roofs that sheltered the people’s thatched homes.

The “devil’s light,” Bobby Okari called it. Now his people, the Asari, bore him on their shoulders to a rough-hewn platform at the center of the village, past the open-air school, its four poles holding up a canopy of wood and palm leaves; the white wooden Pentecostal church, where boisterous celebrants sang and prayed each Sunday morning; the marketplace, now dark for the night, where women peddled an ever-dwindling harvest of fish and fruit, the legacy of oil spills that fouled the oceans, creeks, and farmland.

To Marissa’s anxious eyes, her husband looked elated, as though the festive scene that typified Asari Day, the annual expression of Asari her-itage and harmony, carried no undercurrent of fear. The young men

around him, Bobby's core cadre of followers, held him higher, his burgundy African shirt resplendent, his reading glasses hanging from a gold chain around his neck. On this Asari Day, as ever, the villagers had gathered here at dawn for the singing, drumming, and dancing by groups of girls and women in bright dresses, their celebration pulsing from morning to night. But this Asari Day was different: at Bobby Okari's urging, in every village in Asariland, people had come together—three hundred thousand Asari in all—to protest the devastation caused by the partnership between PetroGlobal Luandia and the regime of General Savior Karama, which, in Bobby's pungent phrase, "drills and kills without remorse."

This village, Goro, was Bobby's ancestral home. His father, Femi Okari, was its chief; though Bobby's fame as a novelist, and then as a spokesman for his people, had taken him to many lands, he still kept a home here to maintain his tribal roots. On this day, Bobby and Marissa had driven here from their compound in Port George, and his followers sang or chanted or beat their sheepskin drums to announce his advent. Now, as the young men thrust him atop the platform, the throng pressed forward to hear him—some men in shirts and pants, others, mostly elders, in the traditional round cap and long robes; the women adorned in head scarves, earrings, and beads set off against bright blouses, the young women's dresses single-wrapped in contrast to the double wrapping of the matrons. As suitable for a married woman, Marissa, a matron at thirty-six despite her slim body and lineless skin, wore a double wrapping, in contrast to Omo, the fifteen-year-old girl whose hand she held and whose beautiful eyes shone with adoration for Bobby Okari.

"Ma'am," Omo said simply, "your husband is a great man."

Looking into the girl's face, still so innocent, Marissa tried to quell the sense of danger she had felt ever since Bobby had conceived this, the first mass protest in the history of Asariland. In its place came a fleeting amazement at the choices that had brought her, an American of mixed race, to this life and this man; to this astonishing and deeply accursed country; and to the Asari, a mere half million people among Luandia's two hundred and fifty ethnic groups and two hundred and fifty million citizens, whose perverse blessing was that beneath their land lay the richest oil reserves in one of the world's most oil-rich regions, the Luandian Delta. Until Bobby Okari, the Asari had endured the consequences in

silence, robbed of heart and hope. But now Bobby, through his eloquence and relentless work, had summoned a grassroots movement, offering the restless young a vision beyond that of the armed militia groups that hid in the swamps and creeks that made the delta a trackless maze. It was Bobby's strength—or blindness—that his belief in the movement he had summoned from nothing overcame his fear of an autocracy whose leader, General Karama, caused those who displeased him to die or disappear.

"The Asari," Marissa answered Omo softly, "are a brave people."

Bobby held up a hand for silence. As Marissa scanned the crowd, she spotted Bobby's father, Chief Femi Okari, his face grim beneath his broad fedora, his eyes slits of disapproval and resentment. But he seemed an island to himself, alone amid the collective admiration of his son, the pride of the Asari. As the cries for Bobby receded into a deep silence, her husband stood taller, his slight form radiating an energy that suffused his proud bearing and made him seem larger than he was, less vulnerable than the flawed and troubled man Marissa knew him to be. As he began speaking, even his voice—deep yet lilting—belied any hint of frailty.

"*Haah Ama,*" he began in Asari, then translated the phrase into English, Luandia's colonial tongue: "Community, I greet you."

Men's and women's voices answered with cries of varied timbres. Then Bobby turned, pointing to the giant flame that lit the dark behind him. "*This,*" he called out, "is the bastard child of a rapacious oil company and a corrupt and brutal autocracy. Together, PetroGlobal Luandia and the Karama regime have polluted our streams, killed our fish, denuded our land. Now they are taking all that is left—the oil beneath our feet."

"Yes," a chorus of voices called out.

Bobby's voice rose above the din. "For years we have suffered. But now, at last, we demand an end to their tyranny. We insist on our rightful share of oil monies for schools, roads, clinics, clean water to drink. The United Nations itself has recognized our oppression. And yet the government and PGL pretend to be deaf and dumb.

"When I sent them the Asari Manifesto five months ago, demanding our rights, they did not answer." Bobby's deep voice became slow and somber. "And six weeks ago, when the people of Lana gathered to protest an oil spill, our government sent Colonel Okimbo and his soldiers to kill eighty-two Asari of both sexes and all ages; rape women and girls; amputate the limbs of men and boys; and burn their village to the ground."

Marissa knew the stories, all too well. So did the villagers: their lowered voices receded into silence, the only sound the deep roar of flaring oil. In the light from the giant orange flame, a shadow crossed Omo's face, and she gripped Marissa's hand more tightly. "Tonight," Bobby said in the same low voice, "we are out in force, three hundred thousand strong, calling for an end to this exploitation in every village in Asariland. Even for General Karama, that is too many villages to raze, too many people to kill."

Calls of approval rose from the Asari. But Marissa's voice caught in her throat: in Luandia her husband's words were sedition, and surely somewhere among his listeners was an agent of the state security services, armed with a tape recorder.

Bobby's face glistened with sweat. "And yet the government and PGL are already committing genocide against the Asari people. When we cannot farm or fish or drink our water—*that* is genocide. When more Asari are dying than are born, and those who survive their infancy can find no work—*that* is genocide. When we are riddled with diseases but have no electricity for hospitals—*that* is genocide.

"That is what oil has done to the Asari—the same oil that runs the factories, heats the homes, and fills the gas tanks of the Americans, the Europeans, and our new exploiters, the Chinese." Bobby stared out at the crowd, moving his gaze from side to side, as though to seal their bond. "In Luandia, oil blackens everything it touches. It fouls the hands of the ruling class that misappropriates its profits. It stains the ambitions of the young, who in their desperation will pick up a gun, sabotage a pipeline, kidnap a foreigner to grab their pitiful share of the riches. It elevates the powerful, and drowns the weak. And it degrades the character of our people, unleashing greed, envy, dishonesty, and corruption. Oil is dirty—as dirty as the slave trade and the craven Luandians who helped the British sell our ancestors."

"Shame," a man called out.

"Yes," Bobby answered. "But now it is not some colonial governor who rules us. It is a Luandian who has suspended our constitution, banned our political parties, jailed our leaders, and shut down our newspapers. Karama's police extort money from the innocent; his prisoners rot for years without a trial; his judges take bribes before pronouncing sentence. And he uses ill-gotten petrodollars to pay off the

generals, bureaucrats, governors, and chiefs who help maintain his power, the better to siphon the billions he steals from us into American jets, Italian sports cars, and bank accounts in Switzerland.”

No, Marissa thought—not at the sound of truth, but from fear of its consequences. For a moment, she shut her eyes, instinctively listening for alien sounds, perhaps a powerboat landing on the beach nearby, the first warning of an invader. Through the roar of flaring she heard a faint but familiar whir. “This must not be,” Bobby was saying. “People are not made for states—states are made for people.”

Marissa opened her eyes. From the sky behind her husband came a streak of light, blurred by the orange glow of the flare. Then the sound she heard merged with the silhouette of a helicopter, hovering above the palm trees with an arrhythmic thud, its beam aimed at the villagers, whose heads turned from Bobby to stare upward at the dark metallic bird. Marissa glimpsed a white circle painted on its side, framing the large black letters PGL.

On the platform, Bobby looked from the helicopter to his people, their connection to him severed by the fear stamped on their faces. Part of Marissa wished for Bobby to send them home.

Instead, his voice carried above the sounds of blades chopping air. He pointed to the intruder. “PGL, too,” he cried out, “is our oppressor. It banished peace from our land from the day it laid its first pipeline, letting nothing stand in its way—not trees or farms or rivers, nor even beast or man.”

As did the others, Marissa saw, Femi Okari looked from the helicopter to Bobby. “Why?” Bobby shouted. “Because we are *Africans*. Petro-Global does not rape the land in the United States or Europe—only in Luandia. And now we’ve become its pawns in a ruthless competition among superpowers frightened that terrorists will cut off the flow of the oil from the Middle East, their lifeblood . . .”

As though in answer, the helicopter swooped down over the platform, the swirling blades drowning out Bobby’s voice, its shaft of light impaling him like a lone figure in a passion play. Following the beam upward, Marissa could make out the fleshy face of a blond man gazing down from the chopper at Bobby Okari. And then, with a leisure that made its departure as ominous as its presence, the helicopter floated away until at last it became a shadow, vanishing in the half-light of an illuminated sky.

Only then did Bobby speak again, his voice softer but still resonant.

“Tonight, we demand that those whose lives depend on oil respect *our* lives and *our* lands. That the United States, PetroGlobal Oil’s home, require its subsidiary PGL to follow the high standard of human rights it professes to value and open its courts to our claims against it. That PGL renounce its pact with General Karama and his machinery of death and open its books so that we can see how much our government has stolen from us. That the Karama regime grant us the right to run our own affairs, and free elections where our ballots are counted, not burned.”

With each demand, the crowd seemed more inspired, its outcry louder and more sustained. “The people of Lana,” Bobby continued, “asked these things and were slaughtered for it. So now I tell Karama this.

“Tonight, throughout Asariland, Asari women are blocking the roads to PGL’s oil facilities. And, a few moments ago, Asari men in boats seized the offshore oil platform that mars the serenity of our fishing waters.” With the voice and manner of a prophet, Bobby pointed over the heads of his listeners. “Look, and you will see.”

Turning with the others, Marissa looked toward the mouth of the creek that ran beside the village to the ocean and saw the flicker of torchlights from the oil platform, as though suspended above the dark waters. Only then did she fully comprehend how much her husband had dared; when Bobby spoke again, the Asari turned to him in wonder. “The time has come,” he told them, “for General Karama to help us build the Asariland of our hopes.

“We know that he can do this. In four years he raised a new capital city from nothing, then named this glistening creation after himself.” Bobby’s lips formed a broad but ironic smile. “So we will promise him that every road, school, and hospital we build will bear his name. We will do this for him, yes?”

Amid the cheers and laughter someone called out, “Yes.”

“It must be so,” Bobby answered, his voice strong again. “For this has become a dangerous country. Too many of our young men, deprived of any future, drink gin and smoke weed from morning to night. Too many others have taken up arms and vanished to hideouts in the creeks, killing one another for the right to live as criminals. If Karama does not yield, we will descend into an unending darkness of corruption, criminality, murder, and reprisal, condemning those who survive to a permanent hell. And among the things that will *not* survive is PGL—”

“Kill them all,” a young man called out.

Glancing through the crowd, Marissa spotted him, a youth taller than most others—restrained from joining the militia, rumor had it, only by his attraction to Omo. Glancing at the girl, Marissa saw her downcast eyes fill with doubt and worry. “No,” Bobby answered. “To act with violence will only bring to our door reprisals far more terrible than what we saw in Lana. I want no more blood spilled in Asariland.”

Uncertainty filled the young man’s face; though some around him nodded their approval, others wore expressions grimmer and more opaque. As though to reassure them, Bobby continued: “But the government’s time is short. Every day our patience frays, and our youth slip beyond our power to restrain them. Karama and PGL must give us justice now, or there will be no peace for the powerful and PGL will be driven from Asariland.”

“*Fuck* PGL,” a voice called, and then a ragged chant came from a cluster of young men near Marissa. “PGL, go to hell. PGL, go to hell . . .”

Bobby held up a hand, his face impassive until, at last, there was silence. “Let us march to join our brothers and sisters,” he told them, “and pray for the souls of our dead.”

AS CONCEIVED BY Bobby, the climactic event would be a meeting with demonstrators from a neighboring village at the site of a recent oil spill, which, bursting into flames, had incinerated men and women from both villages who had come to scavenge for oil. Tonight those assembled would gather in memorial. But at least one of the villagers would be missing: Chief Femi Okari, Marissa noted, had gazed across the water at the torches flickering on the oil platform and then, shaking his head, turned away to walk home.

With Bobby and Marissa at their head, the people of Goro gathered where the road began, many with cigarette lighters held aloft. As the march commenced, the villagers began singing their anthem: “Be proud, Asari people, be proud.”

A few feet ahead, Marissa spoke to Bobby beneath the chorus. “Women blocking roads, men seizing the platform. Did your council approve?”

“Is it dangerous, you mean?”

His voice held a hint of challenge. “I already know that,” Marissa answered calmly. “So do the others.”

“Do you doubt me?”

“Only when I should. What did Atiku say?”

Bobby did not look at her. “Atiku is rallying support in England,” he answered in a weary voice. “Our young need more than words from us, or more will drift away.”

Through her misgivings, Marissa sensed that he had made this decision in the face of resistance from his lieutenants and found it painful to consider how this might end. Taking his hand, she asked, “Is today all you had hoped for?”

Bobby summoned a small smile. “Do you see their eagerness, the joy on their faces? For a day they are free of docility and fear.” He paused, then finished softly, “Were I to die right now, Marissa, I would die a happy man.”

His faintly autumnal tone reminded Marissa of the gray flecks she had begun to notice in his hair, the deepening grooves in his face that betrayed that he was not only older than she, but suffering from an exhaustion he tried to conceal from the others. She grasped his hand more tightly.

For a mile they walked at the head of the Asari along a dirt road forged by PGL repair crews between mangroves and palm trees, the orange glow of flaring gas lighting their path. Then Bobby stopped abruptly.

Marissa followed his gaze. At a fork in the road ahead, three silhouettes hung from the thick branches of a tree, specters in the devil’s light.

Turning, Bobby held up his hand. The marchers fell quiet, save for cries of shock from those who saw what Bobby saw. “Wait here,” Bobby told Marissa.

But she did not. Together, they moved toward the tree, stopping only when the three shadows became corpses. As Bobby held up his cigarette lighter Marissa saw that strangulation had contorted their faces and suffused their eyes with blood. All were Luandian; all wore denim shirts bearing the letters PGL.

Her stomach constricting, Marissa turned to Bobby. Tears shone in his eyes. “Now what will happen to us?” he murmured.

A stirring in the grove of palms behind the corpses made Marissa flinch. The figure of a large man emerged, followed by three others. As the men stepped into the light, Marissa recognized the familiar uniform of Luandian soldiers and saw their leader’s face.

Instantly she felt herself recoil: though she knew him only by the patch over his right eye, by reputation Colonel Paul Okimbo was a mass murderer,

a rapist, and, the survivors of Lana whispered, insane. Okimbo wore the eye patch, it was said, to conceal a walleye and, bizarrely, to evoke the Israeli general Moshe Dayan. Stopping beside the hanging bodies, he trained his remaining eye on Bobby, then Marissa, letting his gaze linger.

Facing Bobby, he said, "This is your work, Bobby Okari."

"No," Bobby answered. "Not mine, and not ours."

Okimbo emitted a bark of laughter. "So you say. But soon you will face the justice of Savior Karama."

Marissa watched Bobby exert the full force of his will to meet Okimbo's stare. A spurt of anger broke the colonel's impassivity. "Unless the Asari withdraw at once," he snapped, "there will be consequences. Some will die."

Feeling the dampness on her forehead, Marissa saw the sheen of sweat on Bobby's face. With palpable reluctance, he answered, "As you say. But this will not end here."

"Of that you can rest assured," Okimbo responded with the flicker of a smile. "I know two hundred ways of killing a man, and more men than that who deserve to die."

To Marissa, the silence that followed felt suffocating. Involuntarily, it seemed, Bobby looked from Okimbo to the corpses, hanging with eerie stillness in the dense night air.

Seeing this, Okimbo placed his hand on the back of the body nearest him, idly shoving it toward Bobby as though propelling a child on a swing. As the dead man slowly swung between them, Okimbo said softly, "For you, hanging will do nicely."