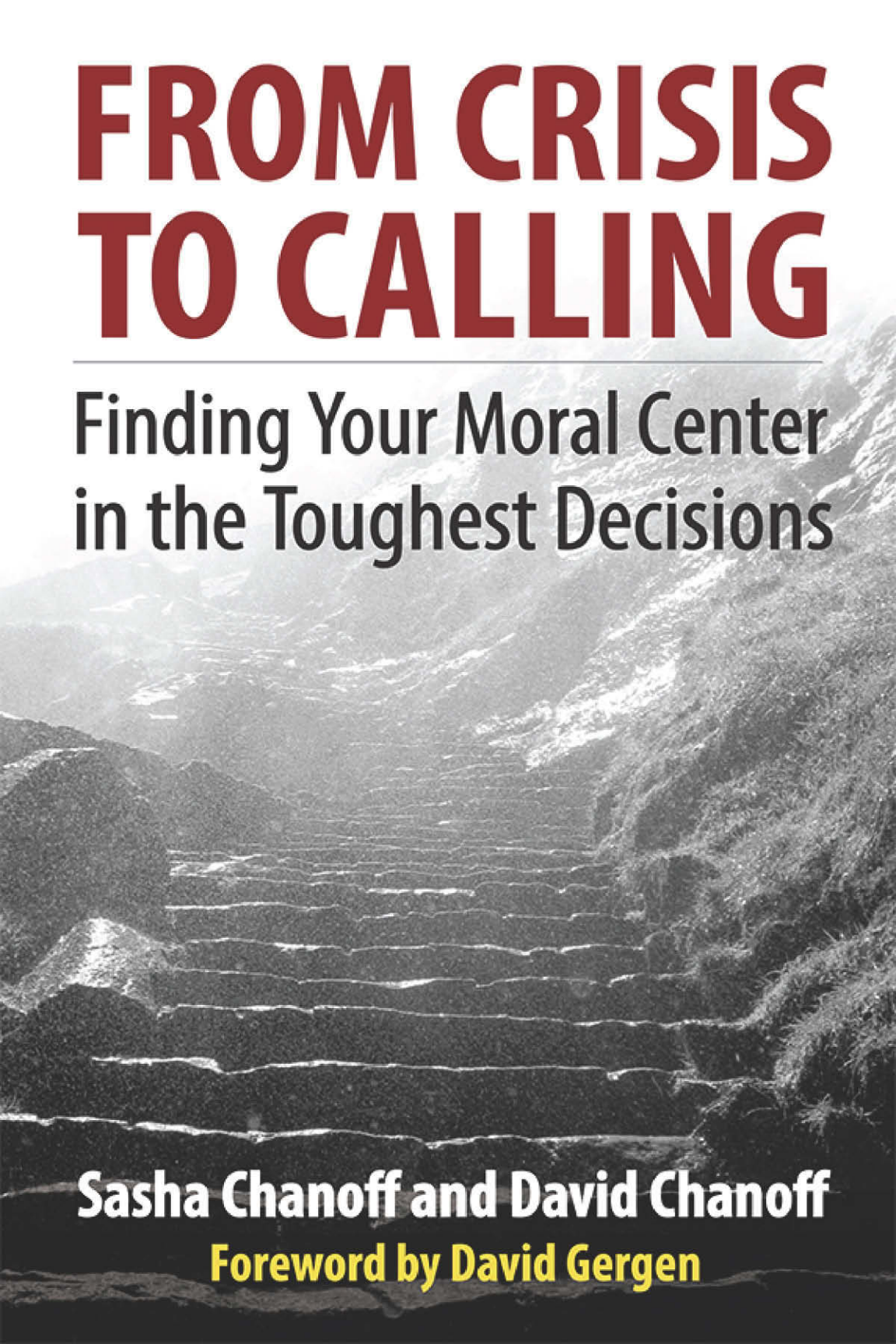
FROM CRISIS TO CALLING

Finding Your Moral Center in the Toughest Decisions



Sasha Chanoff and David Chanoff

Foreword by David Gergen

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Sasha Chanoff
and
David Chanoff

Berrett–Koehler Publishers, Inc.
a BK Currents book

From Crisis to Calling

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This book is dedicated to all those who have lost their lives in the Congo, and to David Derthick and Sheikha Ali, my heroes.

Sasha Chanoff

To my wife, Lissu. We have shared everything meaningful in our lives together—this too.

David Chanoff

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Throughout history, leaders have experienced "crucible moments"—times when they are suddenly thrust into the middle of a crisis and must quickly gather their wits, sort out right from wrong, and act decisively. Those moments often shape them for the rest of their lives. In the case of the best leaders, those tests also become the making of their moral centers.

Think of a young Gandhi early in the 20th century, beginning his life as a barrister in a foreign land, South Africa. The moment when a conductor threw him off a train because he was Indian was not only a humiliation, it was a crucible that propelled him to become a protest leader and eventually win independence for his native people.

Think of the personal dilemma Eleanor Roosevelt had in 1918 as her husband Franklin returned home with pneumonia from a trans-Atlantic voyage. She had to help him with his luggage and in opening his trunk discovered a packet of love letters exchanged with Eleanor's social secretary. A mother of six and a strong believer that her husband would be a great American leader, Eleanor had to decide quickly whether to leave or stay in her marriage. She stayed and helped him become president. But more than that, she began to devote herself to service outside the home, and she became a towering figure in securing human rights in America and the world beyond.

Or think of two very different men at mid-century: one a young Martin Luther King Jr., taking up his pastorate in Birmingham, being thrust into racial conflict when whites threw Rosa Parks off a public bus. King went to his pulpit to urge his parishioners to protest but soon saw. that despite his contrary inclinations, he must go to the streets, too. His protests brought a civil rights revolution. Not

long thereafter, a man who was sometimes King's opponent, Bobby Kennedy, went to Mississippi and discovered hunger and discrimination that horrified him. He became an immensely important voice for social justice.

Crucibles are moments that can change lives and change history. And so they have in the case of Sasha Chanoff and his dad, David. Early in the pages of this stirring book, they tell the story of Sasha's own crucible in the heart of Africa. There he faced, for the first time, life-and-death decisions about how to respond to a refugee crisis. And there, from that moment, Sasha discovered his own moral values and how they transformed him into the world-class leader he has become today.

These crisis situations, the authors tell us, often go much further than simply putting people in touch with the values they need in order to become authentic leaders. "Dilemmas," they write, "require decisions; decisions require actions. Sometimes the required actions reach deep. They generate a full investment of the self—that is to say, they constitute a calling. When that happens, it not only opens us up to *who* we are but to *what* we are." In other words, crises have the power to reveal qualities we harbor within ourselves that may have previously gone unrecognized. They can clarify our sense of ourselves and our capabilities.

After his Congo experience, Sasha founded RefugePoint, an NGO that works throughout Africa to find solutions for individuals and communities in imminent danger. They acted not a moment too soon. The world is now experiencing its biggest refugee crisis in recorded history: more than 60 million people are now displaced by conflict across the globe. The migrant crisis could destabilize Western Europe, and it is causing enormous human suffering in other continents such as Africa.

RefugePoint has become one of the most successful organizations in the world in addressing this catastrophe. Over the past decade, it has successfully helped more than 32,454 refugees gain access to resettlement. It has also become a role model for countless others. In 2013, on behalf of the Gleitsman Foundation, I was proud to present to Sasha the prestigious Gleitsman International Activist Award, bestowed every other year by a global selection committee representing the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School. Students and faculty alike were enthralled by Sasha's story and by the lessons he brought to his leadership.

Happily, Sasha and his dad have now turned his experiences and lessons learned into this important book about moral leadership, *From Crisis to Calling*. It is a work that has application far beyond the refugee world: leaders of NGOs, corporate leaders, and leaders of public institutions face crucible moments, too—times when they face dilemmas, must choose between right and wrong, and then act decisively. Unfortunately, the leaders who make the right moral choices can stay anonymous and unrecognized. But the dozens of scandals we see in business, politics, and even in the nonprofit world remind us that these dilemmas are constant, and indeed, the seductions that lead to moral failure are always present, always beckoning. Crucibles cannot be avoided. The question the Chanoffs address is: how can we best prepare for them before they arrive?

The Chanoffs trace a five-step pathway that starts with being prepared and opening your eyes, then moves to confronting yourself, knowing yourself, and taking courage. Importantly, they teach these lessons through stories that are gripping in their drama and power. From two prominent CEOs, the emergency director of an international NGO, and a former US surgeon general to a distinguished business professor, a family physician, and a former Navy SEAL,

Sasha and David bring together the journeys of individuals from all walks of life.

From Crisis to Calling serves several purposes. It acquaints readers with stories about the meaningful role moral values play in decision making and leadership. It explains ways we can reveal the inner qualities that we all share yet not all of us find. And it prepares us to take the steps that may well help us fulfill our potential as leaders.

From Crisis to Calling is also an antidote of sorts. While the public failings of leaders cover the front pages of newspapers and lead the nightly news, Sasha and David bring us the stories of unsung leaders who have faced tough decisions with morality and grace. They remind us that empathy and compassion—altruism—are deeply rooted in us. That they are there to be nurtured. Novelist Graham Greene once wrote of "those interior courts where our true decisions are made." The Chanoffs, father and son, dive deep into our interior courts, looking for, and finding, the inner qualities that define the truly great and good leaders among us.

David Gergen

February 2016

PREFACE

This is a very personal book for both me and my father and co-author, David Chanoff. Its origins are in a seminal experience I had as a young refugee worker in Africa. Early in the year 2000, a colleague and I were sent into the Democratic Republic of the Congo on a rescue mission to evacuate survivors of countrywide massacres. I did not anticipate that the experience would shape and change me as it did. But the unexpected life-and-death dilemma that confronted us there in a country torn apart by war has forced on me years of reflection. During that mission we faced a decision about whom to take with us, if we could, and whom to leave behind, if we had to. I've pondered ever since: Did we do the right thing? What if we had lost more people? Could I have lived with myself if everyone had perished?

My colleague and I argued our options out during a long, sleepless night, the two of us on different sides about what to do. I had never before been tested by anything remotely resembling this. It was, for both of us, what one writer on moral decision making calls "a crucible," the kind of experience that has the potential to transform a person from who he or she was into somebody with a far clearer sense of self and the rock-bottom values that matter most.

I was unprepared to make a decision of this kind. I had only been working in Africa for six months then. I had never worked in a country at war. I had never had to hire armed guards to protect massacre survivors in a place where many of their family members and friends had been hunted down and killed. I had never had to deal with violent, duplicitous government officials out to either use our rescue operation for their own purposes or shut it down and do their worst to the people we were trying to protect.

During the mission I took precautions to make sure the Congolese officials did not know our precise evacuation plans. Government spies had likely bugged my room and were monitoring emails and phone calls. In spite of this I felt the need to communicate with my parents, to let them know I was all right and to give them some idea about what was happening. Just as I had never done this sort of thing, I knew that this was a new experience for them as parents, worrying about a child of theirs working in a place of great danger.

With a Finnish mom and an American dad, I grew up bilingual. Even if my emails were monitored, I thought it unlikely that the spies could decipher Finnish. So in brief moments at the computer I fired off emails to my parents in my mom's native language, telling them I was okay and a little about what was going on.

After the rescue operation my dad, David, and I started up a conversation that has gone on for years about what happened back then: how that life-and-death dilemma changed the person I was, and how hard-choice dilemmas have impacted others we knew. For myself, that experience shaped the way I looked at people who had suffered violence and persecution in their home countries that forced them into lives as refugees. Eventually I founded a non-governmental organization (NGO), RefugePoint, whose mission is to protect the lives of those who are overlooked or forgotten by the world's humanitarian networks.

Over the last ten years as I've built this organization, I've continually returned to that decision point in the Congo. It has become a guidepost for my leadership because it forced me to think about my own values and the best way to express those through my actions.

As RefugePoint grew, the talks with my dad increasingly focused on to how to build and lead an organization. Eventually those talks extended to discussions with our Berrett-Koehler editor about my particular experience and how that related to leadership more broadly.

My interest in understanding what this decision meant for me grew into an exploration of what critical decision points have meant for others, and about the nature of leadership, and into this book.

And who better to co-write it with than my dad? He was intimately engaged from those first emails he received from the Congo, and he has been a colleague as well in the evolution of RefugePoint. Not least, in his own career he has collaborated on books with leaders in the military, business, health, politics, and other fields, many of whom have experienced their own critical decision points.

The book is in two parts. In Part I, I tell the story of the Congo rescue operation in my own voice and in some detail. We regard this as a kind of "story of stories," the platform for our thoughts about how people make moral decisions and how those experiences can shape who we are and how we interact with our own organizations and communities. In Part II, my dad and I go on to tell the stories of people from many walks of life who have themselves faced decision points that have been pivotal for them. These stories speak to our common need to know who we are. They tell us how this essential knowledge of our own values can transform the impact we make on those around us, how it can, and often does, lead to a calling that we may well have had no idea we harbored within ourselves.

From Crisis to Calling is about moral leadership, the kind that doesn't leave anyone behind. It's about how to identify this kind of leadership within yourself by using crucible moments, or decision points, to hone in on and bring out the humanitarian values such as empathy and compassion that are intrinsic in all of us. It's about how to take advantage of the hardest decisions in our lives in order to tune in to our moral core and use it as a lodestar for leadership.

Sasha Chanoff

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THE FIVE-STEP PATHWAY TO MORAL DECISION MAKING

We found that every leader in our study, young or old, had undergone at least one intense, transformational experience.

Warren Bennis

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.

John Archibald Wheeler

Today a growing wealth of research supports the idea that leadership that is moral, other-centered, trustworthy, and compassionate empowers success. Social scientists such as Dacher Keltner, Martin Seligman, and Barbara Fredrickson have shown that the capacity for altruism is critical to good leadership. "Leaders, in every field," says business guru Warren Bennis, "are richly endowed with empathy." "The crucial decision," says distinguished Harvard business professor Joseph Badaracco, "is not *whether* we should rely on our ethical intuitions, but *how* to do so."

From Crisis to Calling holds these insights as truths essential to true leadership and, more importantly, critical to the business of living a good, fulfilling life, a life that affords a true sense of pride.

Some of our most prominent thinkers about leadership have reached similar conclusions about how character is formed. In searching out the essentials of how leaders are made, they have spent years observing and talking with famous and not so famous leaders about their lives. What have they found?

In his seminal book *On Becoming a Leader*, Warren Bennis wrote that leadership "always emerged after some rite of passage, often a stressful one." In a follow-up study, *Geeks and Geezers*, he elaborated: "We found that every leader in our study, young or old, had undergone at least one intense, transformational experience. That transformational experience was at the very heart of becoming a leader. The descriptive term we found ourselves using is *crucible*." Bill George wrote in his equally influential *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership*, "It is under pressure—when your success, your career, or your life hangs in the balance—that you must decide what your values are. When you are forced to make trade-offs between your values under difficult circumstances, you learn what is most important in your life and what you are prepared to sacrifice for."

Joseph Badaracco focused his discussion in *Defining Moments* more narrowly. The true test, he argues, comes when people must decide between two courses that may both be right. These "right-versus-right choices are best understood as *defining moments* . . . they reveal, they test, and they shape. In other words, a right-versus-right decision can reveal a manager's basic values . . . It shapes the character of the person and, in some cases, the organization."

Crucibles for Bennis. *Defining moments* for Badaracco. *Finding your true north* for George. Each of these writers looks at life and leadership from the standpoint of moral transformation and the

discovery of an essential self—the fundamental values that define you as a person. Each in his own way makes the point that this essential self is essential also to the organizations the leader is part of. Leaders imbue their organizations and communities with values—that is, with the values they find within themselves. Authentic leaders are those for whom the values they live in their personal lives are the same as those they live in their professional lives.

Leadership writers, no matter how famous, tend to be known mainly within the business world, a vast yet limited sphere. But practitioners such as Bennis, Badaracco, and George—and perhaps Peter Drucker most of all—teach us universal lessons about human psychology, true for those of us in other fields of endeavor and true for those of us who live our lives in quieter, more inconspicuous ways. Business is, after all, a great moral theater, driven by the profit motive yet bound by commonly accepted ethical values. These values are often imposed by law, but they also invoke the better angels of our nature. Business is a stage where the desire to act for advantage often plays starkly against our more moral selves whose call we hear, if sometimes only faintly, amidst the competing noises of our lives.

Consequently, the "business" books leading thinkers write are often far more than business books. They suggest that business is a key to the human enterprise generally—the "business" of how we live our lives and how we should live our lives. True, then, for all of us.

It's one thing to say that character is formed, or discovered, in crucibles or defining moments. But ordinarily we do not look to get ourselves into situations like that. If anything, our default is to stay away from them, from the stress they bring, the failure they threaten, the difficult life changes they may portend. We are more motivated to stay in our safety zones, the places we feel comfortable. Others have

expectations of us based on what we've done before and what they think we should be doing now. Those are forceful expectations. We know the behaviors that have worked for us in the past; we have little incentive and little desire to change those. We don't want to push the envelopes we've woven around ourselves. Whether they're constricting or spacious, we've woven them for a reason.

Yet none of us can avoid facing critical decisions. They come with the human territory. We may need to fire a subordinate or perhaps lay off an entire group. We need to choose between alternatives that may inflict pain on a friend or a family member. We face such decisions inevitably. When we do, we can choose to just forge ahead, turning a blind eye to the human side of what we think needs to be done. We can rationalize the necessity of our decision. We can compartmentalize—this is what I had to do, but it doesn't affect the person I really am. We can disregard the moral dimension of the decision, because that is easiest for us; it allows us to get on with our work and our lives.

But the truth is that such rationales—apparent necessity, the expectations of others, fear of failure—can never bring meaningful growth or change. Taking the easy or expected route may provide some transient gain, but far more often those kinds of responses leave us stranded in the same rut. As one business writer put it, "If you do the same as you've always done, you'll get the same as you've always gotten." Critical decisions carry with them the opportunity for transformation and creative growth, but only if we understand them that way. Only if we embrace them for their potential as turning points for ourselves and consequently for those whom we lead and whose lives we impact.

From Crisis to Calling reveals the opportunities present in the hardest decisions and explains how to take advantage of crises and

make the unrecognized power of altruism work for you. It sets out the five principles inherent in confronting critical decisions:

1. Be prepared.
2. Open your eyes.
3. Confront yourself.
4. Know yourself.
5. Take courage.

Through moving stories of leaders from business, the military, humanitarian agencies, health care, and other fields, we will see these principles come alive in ways that illuminate and instruct. Readers will learn how others have built or changed their organizations and their own lives in response to the hardest challenges of their careers by opening themselves up to this five-step critical decision process. *From Crisis to Calling* shows how such challenges so often transform the nature of leadership and create different, more ethical, and more productive leadership practices.

From Crisis to Calling is in two parts. Part I is the story of Sasha and his colleague and the critical decision they faced. We tell the story in its entirety, then look at how it embodies the five-step critical decision process. Part II describes dramatic experiences in the lives of others that illuminate one or more of these steps.

Our goal is to engage leaders in business, nonprofit, and other fields, along with the general reading public, in this "hard decision" phenomenon. There is a transformative potential in choices where options are limited, painful, and full of the possibility of failure. Such choices may open an avenue to new, ethically centered thinking. We want readers to recognize, embrace, and act on their instinctive moral convictions, which these situations can reveal as perhaps nothing else can.

THE FIVE PRINCIPLES

1. Be Prepared.

Awareness is the first requirement. Situations arise that have a moral stake at their core. Be aware that these are decision points that can fundamentally affect the direction of your life and the life of your organization. Often we are closed to the possibilities inherent in such situations. We veer automatically toward the known, the conventional, the safe. We lean toward what others may expect of us and what we may expect of ourselves. We all too easily look the other way when a hard situation confronts us, particularly if opening our eyes might take us out of our comfort zone and down a risky path. Being prepared primes you to recognize these situations for the potential they afford.

2. Open Your Eyes.

Being prepared allows you to open your eyes to examine the decision confronting you with candor. You have given yourself permission to leave your cubicle and accept the possibility that the expected path, the conventional path, is not the only path, and, in fact, may well be the wrong path. Now at least you can see the issue clearly, in particular the moral options facing you.

3. Confront Yourself.

Once you have opened your eyes to the challenge in front of you, you need to explore what to do. Often these decisions are not clear-cut. It's easy to understand a decision when we are presented with a clear right and a clear wrong. It's harder to uncover the proper course forward when any action can bring about good as well as bad consequences—which is often the case in complex organizational decisions. It's important, then, to explore and discuss, to have someone

who can challenge your beliefs and values. Great literature is full of iconic helmsmen who are able to lead the hero through the labyrinths of doubt. You may have some wise counselor or partner of this kind; if not, you will need to be your own helmsman. Either way, be aware that you need the argument, you need to undergo the hard test. Otherwise, opening your eyes may not be enough.

4. Know Yourself.

The process of confrontation and discussion will clarify the decision you have to make, but it will likely have more profound consequences as well. The values you have brought with you to this crucial decision may have served you decently to this point in your career. But facing a moral crux—accepting it, opening your eyes to it, confronting yourself over it—can reveal the underpinnings of your own moral life that may have been opaque to you or perhaps relegated to the sidelines or suppressed in the course of building your career. Moral crucibles have great power to create change. They can put you in touch with your inner self and connect you with your past experiences and even your family history in a way ordinary life does not. They can highlight for you the gap between who you are and who you would like to be. They can give you the wherewithal to tap into the underlying empathy, compassion, and feeling for others so significant in living a fulfilling life and creating an organizational culture that embodies its leader's principal values.

5. Take Courage.

Once you have tapped into your own set of primary values, you will likely understand what the right course of action is for you. That course of action may be the more difficult one. It may bring with it the risk of failure and many negative consequences. How do you make the right decision in the face of fear and potential obstacles? Courage

is the crucial quality here, which is always magnified by the force of moral conviction.

Sasha's story takes place in the humanitarian sphere, but the Congo rescue mission story is a paradigm for decision making in many fields. Business leaders frequently confront situations that call for difficult moral judgments, pitting financial pressures against moral considerations. We see their failures regularly, from Enron, WorldCom, and Volkswagen to others that make the news from week to week. Even in the normal course of business life, when businesses are operating within the expected norms, the conventional response to such moral decision points is to make the apparently more profitable choice.

For managers—especially in business but in other fields as well—the concept of moral leadership may feel idealistic, abstract, something we'd like to practice but that seems distant from the real world of efficiencies, productivity, and the bottom line. Leadership often assumes the ability to make tough-minded decisions that subordinate feelings of altruism, sympathy, and compassion to the need for results. By this criterion, leaders need to be hard-nosed realists, maybe not impervious to human feeling, but able to rise above it in order to achieve success for themselves in their careers and success for their organizations in their businesses.

That commonplace wisdom—the leader as a realist able and willing to apply cool, impersonal reasoning to what are often messy and painful human problems—seems natural, an inbuilt requirement for successful managers. "The boss is a bastard" is a cliché. The boss may or may not be a bastard, but he or she must have a well-developed impersonal and hard-edged approach to making decisions.

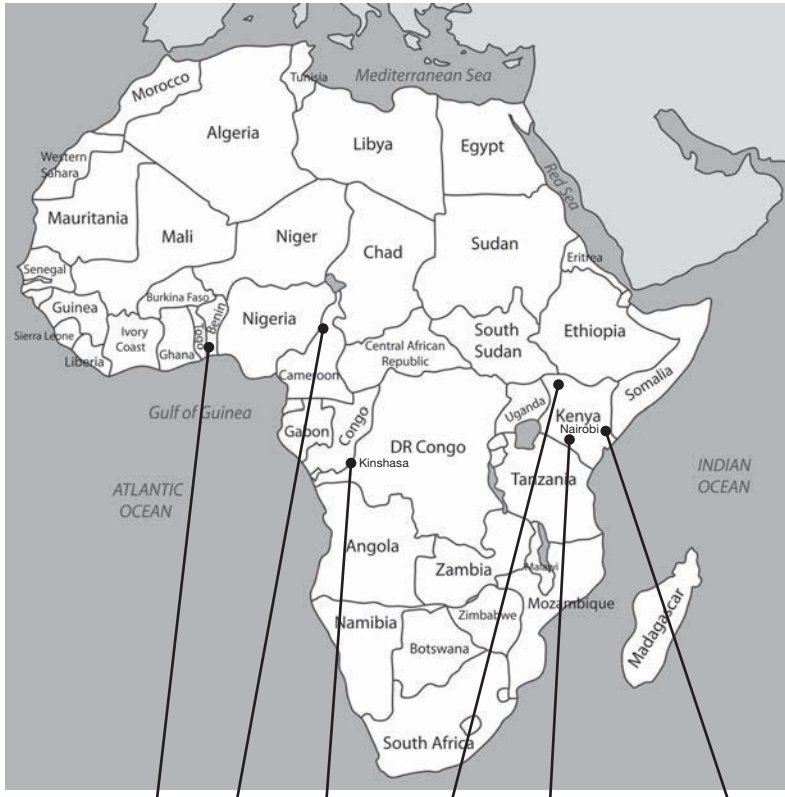
A look below the surface reveals another side of leadership.

The *Fortune* 100 Best Companies to Work For operate on a variety of business models. They provide different pay levels and perks for their employees, but their cultures are universally built on trust, fairness, equitability, and ethical leadership. They are typically philanthropic; they give back to their communities. They incorporate a core set of values that are often at odds with conventional bottom-line thinking. They endow their employees with a sense of dignity, potential, and self-worth. They do this, as Warren Bennis and others argue, first and foremost because their leaders embody empathic, humane values that flow down like water to those around them. Such individuals are, in Daniel Goleman's phrase, "primal leaders." They "resonate." Bill George calls them "authentic leaders," true to themselves.

Many of these leaders have eye-opening defining moments when convention and commonplace wisdom seem to dictate a course of action, but a challenging dilemma reveals a different path, marked by empathy and compassion.

This "hard decision" experience is rarely explored, yet it is a widespread phenomenon in moral development that has great relevance for understanding leadership and institutions. It illuminates the path leaders should be explicitly aware of—that these kinds of decisions can and do serve as guides through the intersection of personal values and institutional or organizational leadership.

This is the subject *From Crisis to Calling* will take up. We will be looking at individuals whose experiences illustrate the different dimensions of our paradigm. We will look at the situations that motivated them and at the consequences for their lives and the lives of their organizations. The ultimate message is about how challenging situations can reveal deep personal values and about the power and fulfillment that come from investing your work with compassion, empathy, and the awareness of others.



Kpomasse Refugee Camp, Ouidah, Benin

Langui Refugee Camp, Garoua, Cameroon

Safe haven outside of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

International Organization for Migration headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya

Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya

PART I

THE CONGO RESCUE MISSION

SASHA CHANOFF WAS A YOUNG FIELD OFFICER FOR THE INTERNATIONAL Organization for Migration recently arrived in Africa when he and a colleague, Sheikha Ali, were sent into the Congo on a life-and-death rescue mission. The Congo was aflame with violence. In response to events that followed the Rwandan genocide, Congo's strongman government had launched a campaign to eradicate the country's Tutsi minority. Many villages had been attacked. Thousands had been killed, many in atrocious ways. Amidst the waves of anti-Tutsi terror, the Clinton administration, together with a number of other

governments and international humanitarian agencies, had pressured the Congolese regime into setting up a protected compound outside Kinshasa. Tutsis who could find their way there would be evacuated to UN camps in Benin and Cameroon; from there, they could be resettled in the United States after the required interviews and security checks.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) had managed three evacuations from the Congo before the process broke down under the weight of violence, intimidation, and corruption. The Congolese had arbitrarily kept back 112 Tutsi men, women, and children from the final evacuation. With the end of the evacuations, these 112 had been left in the compound to die.

Continued pressure, though, forced the Congolese to allow one final mission to extricate those who had been left behind. Sasha and Sheikha Ali were sent in to carry out the operation. They were under strict orders to take the 112 people on their list and no others. Attempting to include anyone other than those for whom they had permission would almost certainly abort the mission and result in the deaths of the 112.

When Sasha and Sheikha arrived at the compound, they found that the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) had brought in thirty-two widows and orphans the previous day, rescued from an execution center where they had been starved and brutalized for sixteen months. The women and children looked like World War II concentration camp victims. Without nutrition and medical help they were unlikely to survive more than a few days. Sasha and Sheikha had to decide what to do. Should they take those on the approved list and leave the widows and orphans to their fate? Or should they attempt to include them and risk everyone's lives?

ONE

BE PREPARED

Confronting the Unexpected Dilemma

Sasha's story begins here, on his and Sheikha's first day in the Congo. They had been to the US embassy and to the Congolese so-called Ministry of Human Rights, which was anything but. At the day's end they met with representatives of the International Committee for the Red Cross, the United Nations Refugee Agency, and with officials from other nations supporting the Tutsi rescue operation—the "contact group." They made it clear they would only be taking the 112 people on the list and no one else. Sasha begins by describing what happened then.

I was just finishing my briefing when the man from the International Committee for the Red Cross stood up. "I understand what you said." His voice had an edge to it. "You're only going to take the people on your list. You say you don't have permission for anyone else and you say you don't have any extra seats on the plane. But now there's a new group of people you have to take. Yesterday we brought thirty-two widows and orphans into the protection center from one of the execution prisons. They were there for sixteen months. All the adult

males were killed. None of these women and children will last another week. You must put them on this flight."

David Derthick, our boss, had warned me about the contact group players. "They're all going to have people they'll want you to take out," he said. "They'll pressure you to do it. Don't take them! Just go in, tell them what the plan is and stop there. If you let anyone outside the list on that plane, you'll kill the whole mission. The Congolese will flood you with fraudulent cases and you won't have any way of saying no. The whole thing will implode and you'll lose everybody. They'll kill everyone who's left. You tell them. Just the list. No one else."

The ICRC man was still standing. "Unfortunately," I told him, "the flight is completely full. We don't have any more room on the plane. We simply are not able to take further cases. The list is closed. This evacuation is closed." But as I spoke, my eyes met Sheikha's. Widows and orphans, right out of a death camp. We never expected anything like this. What were we supposed to do now?

At seven the next morning, a beat-up black compact was waiting at the curb outside our hotel. Sheikha knew the driver, a short, fat man with a furtive look. He had worked for Sheikha and David during the earlier evacuations. We had also hired three other drivers to be on call for Immigration Department or Ministry of Human Rights officials we might need to ferry around for one reason or another. On the previous missions, if David or Sheikha needed an official's presence or documents delivered, or if there was an offsite meeting, people often claimed they didn't have cars—or if they did, the cars had no gas or had broken down. A money present would fix any of that, but the delays had made life difficult. We figured that if we hired cars we'd have fewer problems.

The protection center was an hour's drive from downtown Kinshasa. We drove through a sleepy suburban area that looked

upscale, with nice houses and gated yards. Kinshasa itself was so tense it felt like it might explode at any moment. But the neighborhoods out here seemed peaceful. A few people were leisurely strolling on the streets, small shops were opening, the owners setting up display stands for their goods.

We pulled off the main road onto a street bordered by walled compounds. In front of us were massive black double doors set in a high wall topped by jagged glass shards jutting into the air. Sheikha gave a little nod. "This is it, the protection center." Guards with AK-47s stopped us. One of them peered into the car, then swung the doors open, and we drove through.

The walls surrounded an area that looked to be about two acres. A large gray building sat in the middle with tents set up around it. A lot of people were milling around, more than I expected. Many more than the 112 on our list. They were watching us; a car with visitors meant something. As we drove slowly toward the building, faces appeared at the car windows, staring in. Then somebody shouted, "Sheikha!"

It was as if an electric shock swept through the compound. People were suddenly streaming toward us, and in moments the car was surrounded. People were shouting, "Sheikha! Sheikha!" which quickly turned into a chant: "Sheikha Sheikha Sheikha Sheikha!" They were jostling the car, faces pressed close to get a look. I tried to keep my head down. I wanted to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, which was a crazy thought. With only Sheikha and me in the back seat, I was drawing as many stares as she was.

Before we left, David had told me that people would be overwhelmed when they saw us. "They'll be so happy to see you, they'll be crying," he said. "They won't be able to control themselves. It's going to be rough, so you better prepare yourself. Most of them are sure they're going to die there."

I thought I was prepared, but not for this mob of deliriously excited people. Sheikha had spent many months in this center, interviewing and screening people for the earlier evacuations. Many knew her from then, and those who didn't seemed to have instantly understood who she was and what she must be here for. Sheikha's arrival was the absolute best news they could possibly have. No one in the compound knew that another evacuation was planned. As far as they could tell, they were in limbo, expecting sooner or later to die—probably sooner—and sure they would never see their loved ones again. But suddenly, here was Sheikha, their hope. A straw they could grasp on to. Sheikha meant another evacuation flight must be happening. Sheikha had come back to save them.

Most of these people weren't going anywhere, though they didn't know it yet. They were going to find out soon enough: as soon as we registered the 112 and not them. Then what? When we drove in, I had seen police around, but only a few. Nowhere near enough to control this big a crowd. How this might work out was anybody's guess.

The car stopped. We were surrounded by chanting people and couldn't move. We managed to shove the doors open and get out as a couple of police tried to clear a little space. People seemed almost out of their minds to see Sheikha. They were smiling, laughing, shaking her hands, reaching out to pat her on the shoulder, trying to hug her. And Sheikha was smiling back, recognizing them, saying hello, as if she was genuinely happy to be back here.

We had to find a relatively private place where we could bring people in one at a time, or one family at a time, to interview them, record their information, and take their pictures. There were a couple of tables set up on a hill nearby, and we waded through the crowd in that direction. After climbing a few feet, I turned back around and scanned the faces, wondering if I could somehow spot the thirty-two women and orphans. Nobody stood out, except for a tall man in a

fedora and sunglasses who was keeping off to one side. Unlike everyone else, he didn't seem excited or happy about Sheikha's arrival. He just stood there and watched, looking out of place and vaguely sinister. He seemed to be watching me as well as Sheikha. I wanted to say something to her, but people were still pressing around. Across the compound the guards were swinging the big doors closed and barring them. I turned away and headed up the little hill.

At the top, an ICRC person introduced himself. The International Committee for the Red Cross was in charge here. They were running the protection center, though they seemed to have only a few people. A couple of Congolese men in suits were sitting at the tables already, obviously officials, I assumed from the Ministry of Human Rights, which, given their history of corruption and abuse, was a name right out of George Orwell. I wasn't clear on what they were doing here, but Sheikha hardly took notice of them so I didn't either. Looking down at the crowd at the bottom of the hill, it seemed to me like four or five hundred people. By now they had quieted down. I took the list out of my bag and read the first names: a group of three, apparently single women as there was no notation of families. I asked one of the guards to find them and bring them up.

While we were waiting, I asked Sheikha where she thought the widows and orphans might be. Sheikha glanced over at the suits and gave me a quick look that said shut up. I kicked myself for being a little slow. These were our so-called helpers from the ministry, but they were really our minders.

The guard brought the three women to our table. I wondered what they had been through and why they were alone. What had happened to their families? But we didn't have time to start asking people about their experiences. This was Sunday. Our chartered jet was coming on Thursday. We were going to have to get the basics quickly. Name, date of birth, gender, relatives in the center. Our list had only minimal

information, but from my experience in similar situations I knew that when you start asking people questions you often find that even your basic information isn't only incomplete, it's wrong.

We verified the first three and I took their pictures. Next was a family of six: mother, father, four children, including an infant. The parents looked nervous and surprisingly healthy. Again I wondered.

After them came two men, a father and son. Our list said they had been split off from the rest of their family during the last evacuation. Before Sheikha could ask the first question, the father started questioning her. Did she know how his wife was doing in Cameroon, where the evacuees had been sent? What about his three daughters? Security had grabbed him and his son from the line as they were waiting to board the plane. Why had they done that? His wife had tried to hold on to him, his daughters were hysterical. The soldiers had torn them apart. All this just came flowing out. What had happened to his family? Did they know he and his son were alive? They probably thought they were kept back to be killed. Was there any way he could get a message to them to tell them they were okay?

He was talking so fast he was practically incoherent. Sheikha told him that we couldn't get his wife a message now, but that he'd be seeing her and his daughters soon. Right now we had a lot of work to do and she needed to ask him some questions. The faster we could do that, the faster everything would go. She looked him in the eyes as she said this, and there was something about her that calmed him down. Her look said: Don't worry. We're going to get you out of here and reunited. Everything's under control. You're going to be fine.

The man took a deep breath and composed himself. Then he answered her questions. When I took him and his son aside for their photos, he said under his breath, "Please hurry. This is a dangerous place."

As we called up more individuals and families for verification, I could feel the mood shifting in the crowd below. People were supposed to stay at the bottom of the hill, but some we hadn't called found their way up to ask if they could be included. If not, when was the next flight going to be? Could we register them for that one? We didn't say anything. Not about this flight or any other flights. If their names were on the list we'd been given, we would interview them. About future flights, there might be one but we didn't know. We were sorry, we simply had no information.

While this was going on, Sheikha looked calm, unruffled. I tried hard to look the same. But we both knew exactly what was going through people's minds as they watched those called for interviews walk up the hill to our table. "That family is getting out," they were thinking. "But what about *me*? What about *my* wife and *my* children?"

As more people came up and asked the same questions, we could feel the tension building. One young man looked straight at me and said, "What do you think is going to happen to me if you don't take me out? They're going to kill me." He had a long face, wide eyes, fine features—the stereotypical Tutsi look. He wasn't hysterical. His tone was calm and measured. He was quietly pleading for his life. "You know what's going to happen to me? You need to take me out of here."

An hour or two into the process I walked down the hill to the gray building to go to the bathroom. As I was coming back I was suddenly surrounded by four young men. They were too close, right in my face. I tensed up and looked around for the police. But they were all smiling. One of them said, "We're El Memeyi's nephews. Do you know him? Do you know anything about him?"

El Memeyi was one of the Tutsi leaders. He had been on an earlier evacuation that had gone to a UN refugee camp in Benin. I had met him there when I was preparing people from that evacuation for resettlement in the United States.

"Oh, my God," I said. "I was just with El Memeyi in Benin a little while ago."

Their eyes lit up. "Really? What's happening with him? How is he? Tell us about him."

"He's fine. He and some of your other relatives will be going to the United States soon. They're worried about you. When they heard you didn't make it onto the last flight they didn't know what to think."

I was about to tell them more—I was excited to see them and wanted to fill them in about Benin. Then out of the corner of my eye I noticed that the tall man in the fedora and sunglasses was moving closer to us, obviously trying to catch what I was saying. I quickly cut off the conversation. "Everything's fine with them, don't worry." The guy in the fedora gave me the creeps. I was getting a definite sense of menace from him. "Maybe we can talk later," I said to the nephews.

Up at the tables Sheikha was by herself. Our minders had gone off for their own break. I gestured down the hill. "That guy in the hat and sunglasses, with the ratty sport jacket. Do you see him? Do you know anything about him?"

Sheikha looked. "That bastard is going to burn in hell," she said. "He's *Interahamwe*."

I was shocked, not just by what Sheikha said but by how she said it. I had never heard her curse before.

"When they took the 112 off the buses last time, that bastard was gloating about it."

Interahamwe! I took a moment to process what it meant that we had an Interahamwe here. Interahamwe were the Hutu Power paramilitaries who carried out the Rwandan genocide. They were mass murderers. They had had plenty of help, but they were at the heart of it. When they were finally driven out of Rwanda, they reorganized in the Congo, planning to go back into Rwanda to finish what they had started. It was their presence in eastern Congo that started the

giant conflagration currently tearing the country to pieces. It made me feel dirty just having one of those people here, like being in the same space with a Nazi SS officer.

Sheikha had spent so much time at the center that she knew the place inside out. People had told her about this person and about others like him. He wasn't the only bad guy who had been placed among the Tutsi refugees. They were there to do whatever damage they could—to sabotage the evacuations or spy for the Congolese security forces. Or maybe worse. Refugee camps are dangerous places. Refugees come from places in conflict, and often the conflict follows them in the form of assassins who want revenge or to permanently silence witnesses. The Hutu/Tutsi killing didn't spare people just because they happened to be in some supposedly protected camp, and this center was a shaky place with just a handful of guards, drawn from a regime that hated Tutsis.

The whole thing was a giant paradox. The Congo regime was slaughtering Tutsis right and left, but at the same time was being forced to help save at least some of them by allowing this protection center to operate.

What had shut down IOM's rescue missions was that the Congo's strongmen had seen the huge financial potential of the evacuations. Their country was coming apart. Seven African nations had armies in the Congo fighting it out for the country's vast mineral resources. Free flights out, along with potential US visas and future green cards, were worth a fortune to anybody able to pay. The intimidation and fraud had finally become too much for my boss, David Derthick, and he had told the Americans, the UN, and the ICRC that the International Organization for Migration couldn't run any more flights. Sheikha and I were handling the ground operation for this final mission, while Davide Terzi, an IOM senior emergency management person, was trying to keep the Congolese big men in line.

That was why the Interaham we were here. They had been sent in by the regime to assassinate anyone on their hit list. I only knew one intended victim for sure: Jacob Batend, one of the 112 people on our list. We hadn't registered Jacob yet; he was somewhere down there in the crowd. Jacob's name had come up time and again. David Derthick had said that if we got only one person out it had to be him. Jacob was a lawyer, one of the leaders of the Congolese Tutsis from the southeast. A gentle man, he was widely admired and beloved by his people. Before the regime decided to cleanse the country of Tutsis, Jacob had worked for the government in the president's office. When the terror started, he was in the crosshairs. Because he had been part of the government, he now had a price on his head. He was a Tutsi who knew too much.

Fortunately for Jacob Batend, his wife wasn't Tutsi. She was from a tribe that was well-connected politically, so she and their young daughter were safe. Jacob went into hiding. Sheikha had spent time with him on her earlier missions at the center and knew many of the details of his story. He spent a year moving from one hideout to another, never staying in one place for more than a couple of weeks at a time. Jacob's friends had hidden him, but people who harbored Tutsis were putting their lives and their families' lives at risk. Children were curious about the man in the attic whom they had been told was there to fast and pray. They would wonder why they weren't allowed to invite their friends over. Neighbors would become suspicious. After a while, the place would just become too dangerous and Jacob would have to move on.

Since Kinshasa was under curfew, Jacob could only be moved during the daytime. Buried under blankets and clothing in a sweltering car trunk, he had to wait until the children in the next safe house had gone to sleep. That often meant an entire day in stifling 140-degree heat.

After many months on the run, Jacob heard that his wife, who was pregnant when he fled, had given birth to another daughter. He also heard that his eldest brother had been killed along with his wife and their children, then that his second brother and his family had been killed. And that was only the beginning. His two sisters and their families, and many of his uncles, aunts, and cousins, were also among the dead. Jacob's entire extended family was all but wiped out.

It was a year into the anti-Tutsi pogrom before the ICRC, the United States, and others brought enough pressure to force the Congolese to allow a protection center. Jacob Batend found his way there, where he was reunited with his wife and two little girls. He had been on the run for thirteen months. Once in the center, as weak as he was, he had taken the lead in helping and counseling other Tutsis, many of whom had suffered tragedies as terrible or even more terrible than his own.

Jacob and his family had been scheduled to be evacuated on David and Sheikha's second mission, but at the last moment security held them back. On David's final mission, they were scheduled again. This time they were allowed to board the buses for the airport. But that last evacuation had spiraled out of control. A Kinshasa newspaper was fed information that IOM was giving out free US visas. Thousands of people mobbed the Human Rights Ministry, where David and Sheikha had often been seen. David heard that people were offering bribes to government officials—houses, cars, and giant sums of money, anything to get themselves or their relatives onto the evacuation. The day before the departure date, Sheikha's main black market money contact was arrested. The pressure was so great that another IOM officer who worked with David and Sheikha buckled under it and returned to Nairobi.

When the caravan with Jacob and his wife aboard arrived at the airport, the buses were surrounded by soldiers, police, and UN and US

embassy staff. Jacob got off the bus with his family and walked toward the plane. Then immigration officers grabbed him and hustled him off.

I had heard this story from Sheikha, who had been devastated. She had cried bitterly when soldiers dragged him away from his wife and daughters. When she and David followed up to see what had happened, they were told that Jacob had been taken for interrogation and was about to be hauled off to an execution site when ICRC personnel succeeded in finding him and pressuring the soldiers to return him to the protection center. I wondered exactly how they had managed that particular feat.

As far as we knew, Jacob still had a price on his head. It was possible that the Interahamwe's main goal in the protection center was to assassinate him.

That was only one reason we were keeping our mouths shut. We didn't want news to spread about timing or anything else. The ministries had our schedule, but that didn't mean the information had filtered out to the Interahamwe or any other sinister types who might have gotten into the compound. Knowing our deadlines might jolt them into action. If people with bad intentions knew when we were leaving, they could arrange for roadblocks. They could stop the buses and incite mobs to attack or arrange for some kind of militia ambush. Someone might bribe the bus company to suddenly find they had no buses available on the day we had ordered them. They could blackmail us with these or other threats. Political figures or power brokers could use the popular anti-Tutsi bloodlust to wreak havoc in a dozen ways. Unscrupulous types could sell information about when the flight was leaving along with promises to get people on it. The possibilities were endless, none of them good.

On previous evacuations, David and Sheikha's hotel phones had been bugged. They had been followed. Their rooms and things had been searched. We anticipated that this was going to be happening to

us as well. I expected that my email would be monitored. We assumed our drivers were being paid off by the government to listen in on our conversations. The situation made me think of the old joke—if you're not paranoid, you must be crazy.

Jacob Batend was in the middle of our list. When we called him up, I watched to see if our ministry minders showed any signs of recognition. They didn't. Jacob was a smallish man, five-foot-eight or so, very gaunt. He smiled and answered our questions in a soft voice. Despite their history with each other, neither he nor Sheikha gave any indication that this was anything more or less than any other interview. They hardly looked at each other. A few simple questions, a few simple answers. When I took him aside for a photograph I was thinking, this is him. This is the man we are meant to get out of here whatever happens. Then he was gone down the hill, back into the crowd.

It was late in the afternoon when Sheikha and I finished the interviews. We were physically exhausted from the heat and emotionally exhausted from the imploring eyes of the many hundreds who now understood that they would not be getting out. We had registered all 112, everyone we had been sent to take out.

As we were packing up, Francois, the ICRC official, motioned us aside. "I know what you announced at the meeting yesterday, that you're only evacuating the ones who were left behind last time." He glanced at the minders. "But what is this, that IOM will not consider these other people? These women and children we just brought in. Widows, orphans. They came straight from prison, a death camp. Have you seen them?"

He gestured toward a big tent pitched near the back end of the compound's crumbling cement dormitory. "Please, they're in there. Go. See them."

Sheikha and I looked at each other. One day gone and we could already feel what was building up in this place. We had four or five hundred desperate people in front of us, only 112 of whom would be leaving for safety. All of them were Tutsis, many of them tall and thin with straight noses and narrow faces, features that were an automatic death sentence everywhere in this country but here.

Trying to get anyone else on the flight was out of the question, even assuming we could think of a way to finesse our minders or maybe find the right people to pay off. And many of those not on the list had been in the compound for a month or two already, after surviving who knew what horrors. The women and children in the tent had just arrived. How could we even think of putting them ahead of others who were here earlier and needed to get out just as badly? We were probably going to end up with a riot on our hands. Trying to take any of these new arrivals would be pouring gasoline on a fire.

"Listen," Sheikha told Francois, "you know we can't take anyone else. That's all they're allowing. We don't have a way around it."

"I understand," he said. "All I want you to do is go and see them."

I didn't want to go. I knew what I was going to see if I did. Women and children who had been through hell. We had just interviewed a hundred-plus people who had been through hell. Seeing these people in the tent would only make things worse. There was nothing we could do for them.

"Anyway," said Sheikha, "how did you find them, how did you know about them?"

"I'm not sure," said Francois. "I heard there might have been a relationship between one of the teenage girls and some military person."

"How was it that you didn't find them before?"

"They were in Kananga. In a military prison. It was an execution center. You must see them." He looked straight at Sheikha. "Go, go see them."

"No," she said. "I can't."

"Just see them. Go and look at them. They're Tutsis. Women and children. If you leave them here, what will happen? You know what will happen."

I could feel Sheikha's agitation. She was beginning to tremble. "Sasha," she said, "you stay here. I'm going to go." This was just what David said would happen. This was why he wanted me to be in charge instead of Sheikha. Sheikha was a bleeding heart, he told me. It was her one flaw. And now I was going to have to deal with her and whatever she was going to think after she saw what was down there.

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