

# PRELUDE

## **1963 Congo Rain Forest.**

### **The Simba rebellion**

*The woman brought her son to the convent set deep in the forest. "Take him," she said in French.*

*The Belgian nun replied in Lingala, the local language. "Where is his father?"*

*"He is gone," said the woman. "They have all gone."*

*The small boy gripped his mother's hand as the nun studied him and frowned. "Was his father a white man?" the nun asked.*

*"Yes," said the mother. "I did not wish it, but he forced me."*

*The nun continued to frown. "Do you know this white man's nationality?"*

*The woman shook her head. "He was just a white man from the mine. They are gone now."*

*"We are also going," said the nun "If we stay here, we will all be killed."*

*"Take him with you," the mother begged. "I cannot keep him. He is not of our tribe. He cannot be accepted. The Simbas will kill him."*

*"The Simbas will kill all of us!"*

*The mother shook her head. "They say that the Americans are coming and they will save the white people."*

*"Was his father an American?"*

*"He was white," the woman said, "and he spoke to me in English."*

*The nun spread her hand helplessly. "Let us hope that the Americans will take him as one of their own."*

*The mother tried to release the boy's hand. He tightened his grip.*

*"You go with the sisters," said the mother. "I cannot keep you."*

*She pried her hand free of his grasp and turned from him. He watched her walk away into the cool green depths of the forest.*

*"Come inside," said the nun. There was no kindness in her voice.*

*She led him through the open gates and for the first time in his short life he saw the brick buildings of the Belgian colonists, the chapel of the nuns, and the statue of the white woman, the mother of the god they worshipped.*

*The nun took him into a small room, empty of furniture. A little of the friendly green forest sunlight sifted into the room through a barred window. He stood in the light and waited patiently. His mother had told him to be obedient to the nuns. If they wanted him to wait, he would wait.*

*The sound of a vehicle engine filtered in through the window and then women's voices calling and responding in French, the language of the colonists. Doors banged, the engine roared, and then the sound faded away. The boy continued to wait. He waited until the light faded from the room and the night insects began to swarm.*

*He was hungry, tired, and thirsty. Perhaps the nun had forgotten about him. He approached the door with caution. Should he go outside? He pushed the door open and looked outside. Moonlight filtered*

*through the canopy of trees revealing the empty courtyard, the open gates, and the dirt track that led back into the safety of the forest.*

*Two shadowy figures made their way toward him out of the depths of the forest - a tall man and a child walking side by side. They entered through the open gate. The moonlight fell on the face of an aged man who not of the boy's tribe - a fierce face crisscrossed with a pattern of tribal scarring. Beside him stood a skinny boy, also not of his tribe.*

*The man spoke to him in Lingala, calling him forward to stand in the light and then grunting in surprise at the lightness of his skin.*

*"Where are the nuns?" the boy asked.*

*"Gone," said the man. "By now they will be dead. The Simbas are coming this way."*

*"I want to go home," said the boy.*

*"You have no home."*

*"My mother—"*

*"I told you. The Simbas are coming. They will kill your mother."*

*"The Americans—"*

*"They will not want you."*

*The man turned to the other boy, the one who had entered the compound with him. "I will keep one of you," he said, "but not both of you."*

*His hands were large and strong and he gripped each of the boys by the back of the neck as he pushed them into the little room where the faint moonlight trickled through the window.*

*"I will keep one of you," he said again. "I will keep the one who is alive when the sun rises."*

*He turned away from them and stepped outside. The boy heard the sound of a wooden bar dropping into place to lock the door.*

*In the morning the man opened the door and looked inside. He saw blood, so much blood. The small boy, the child of the white father, was alive - the other boy was not.*

*Gunfire rattled in the distance. The Simbas were coming. The witchdoctor and his new apprentice walked away from the convent and the sound of battle ... and into the deep forest.*

## CHAPTER ONE

**Present**

**Sarah Jensen**

**Uganda, East Africa**

The last thing in the world Sarah Jensen wanted to be was awake. She had grown accustomed to the sound of rain drumming on the tin roof but now a new sound disturbed her sleep and brought her unwillingly into the unwelcome present. The room was stiflingly hot. Evidently the power had gone out yet again and the fan was no longer moving the moist air.

Sarah wanted to pull the sheet over her head and return to sleep. She was determined to stay in this room and stay asleep until her grandmother was ready to admit defeat and take her home. Unfortunately, sleep was now impossible. The drooping mosquito net had plastered itself against her face and once she

had swatted it away, she was wide awake and listening to a confusion of loud voices right outside her window.