

Shanee Stepakoff
Song of the Gravedigger

(*Special Court for Sierra Leone, TF1-253, AFRC Prosecution, April 15 & April 18, 2005*)

I recall April
nineteen ninety-nine.
I know what happened.
I never forget anything.
I will answer.

You want to know
what happened in our town?
One morning, a Friday,
we saw some people
in our town.
They came from a village
known as Ro-Taron.

They made a complaint
to the Gbethis and the soldiers
that their people at Ro-Taron
had been killed by rebels. They made a plea
that they needed help
to bury them.

The Gbethis and the soldiers
summoned us.
They called some young men,
told them to go and dig
so that the people would be buried.

I was among those
selected to go.
They gave me a shovel.
I held it.
We were about to go
to Ro-Taron.
We started,
but we never reached there.

As we were going,
we were in a line.
The Gbethis were leading us.
They were in front.

We, the civilians, were behind.

We were on our way.

We heard a gunshot.

We heard sporadic firing.

The Gbethis told us
that we should run away,
that we'd been targeted by rebels.

We ran away.

We returned to the village
we had come from.

As we arrived there,
we were being pursued.
The Gbethis and the rebels
were shooting each other
so I passed.
I went into the bush and I took my wife
and we fled.

We went to another village
called Ro-Konta
two miles away.
I had my business there.
I had my mother there.
I had some of my children there.

When I reached Ro-Konta,
I told my mother that we had to go
because there was a lot of shooting
nearby, the rebels were not far,
so my mother, wife and children
went to Lungi.

I took my cigarettes
and my diamonds
that we were selling
and I told my brothers
that we had to flee.

We followed a path,
which is a shortcut
that led us to another
town, Port Loko.

I gave my brothers
some cigarettes to carry
on their heads in big
plastic containers.

Well, as we were going,
as we approached the town,
a town called Makambisa,
just by the forest
that was near the town,
we did not know
that we were drawn
into the rebels.

Behind us, we saw some
pointing their guns
and they said, "Wait."
We waited.
We wanted to run,
but we couldn't advance
because others
had come right in front.

Thus they captured us.
They took our cigarettes.
They stripped off my piece.
I had some money in my bag.
They took the money from me.

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