

A Small Boy: Ruminations on a News Photo

A Story

(and the newspaper's correction two weeks later)

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Taken just by itself, a threat, but not, high in height, ready to strike. The Times, June 26, 2008. It is a news, late edition, ready to go. It is a news, late edition, ready to go.

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Suffering Great and Small

An 11-month-old boy with broken legs found shelter in a church in Harare, Zimbabwe. His mother said goodbye with the governing party's blessing to a life of hardship, but she had no choice but to leave her child in the hands of the church. Page A12.

Justices Bar Death Penalty For the Rape of a Child

Damages Cut Against Excon In Valdez Case

By JOHN L. PYLE

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that had there been a \$1 million punitive damages award against Exxon Mobil in about 2004, the ruling essentially precluded a legal fight that started when the Exxon Valdez, a supertanker, struck a reef and spilled 11 million gallons of crude oil into the Prince William Sound in Alaska in 1989.

Execution Ruled Out, 5-4, if Life Isn't Taken

By LINDA GREENGLASS

WASHINGTON — The death penalty is unconstitutional as a punishment for the rape of a child, a sharply divided Supreme Court ruled Wednesday.

Push in Bronx For H.I.V. Test For All Adults

By ANTHONY M. SOTER

The New York City health department plans to announce on Thursday an additional three-year effort to give an H.I.V. test to every adult living in the Bronx, which has a far higher death rate from Aids than any other borough.

Delicate Talks for 2 Democrats on Path to Unity

By GREGG GARBER

and JEFF ELLIOTT

WASHINGTON — With the help of one of Washington's best-known lawyers, Democratic Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton are negotiating a package of compromises that may help them reach a deal to support Mrs. Clinton's campaign.

Lawyer, Robert B. Bennett, who has broken out a number of proposals for voters including Mr. Obama, Mrs. Clinton and Bill Clinton, is working to find a compromise that would allow the two campaigns to merge into a single effort to win the White House.

and her rival and dispatched a list of Mrs. Clinton's bid agencies to work in Missouri and Ohio.

Olympic-Style Test Didn't Flag Doped Samples, Study Says

By GINA COLADON

Athletes who took a check by having themselves tested with a performance-enhancing drug, but found their blood-test results to be within the range of normal, are more likely to be doped than those who were not tested.

For Iraqi Christians, Money Bought Survival, but at What Cost?

By ANDREW S. KRAMER

MOBIL, Iraq — As prices for everything, including food, soared in Baghdad, the leader of the Christian community in that war-torn city gathered some 40 families in a rooming house.

With No Untraditional Classroom

By JEFFREY M. PERAZICH

Alpha Omega, a school in New York, has a unique approach to education. It is a school where students are not just students, but also teachers.

Men's Wear From Milan

By JEFFREY M. PERAZICH

The men's wear for spring and summer from Milan is a mix of traditional and modern styles, with a focus on quality and craftsmanship.

Typography of the Heirloom

By JEFFREY M. PERAZICH

A family heirloom is a piece of clothing that has been passed down from generation to generation, often with a story behind it.

As Unexpected Deluge

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A storm that accompanied a drought in the Midwest brought a deluge of rain to the region, causing flooding and damage.

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A small boy sits alone on a bare concrete floor in a cavernous room. Behind him, eight people are arranged in a tableau along the back wall. They all appear to be women but it is difficult to tell. Six of them are sitting on chairs. The other two, on the far right of the group, are sitting on the floor, although there are empty chairs against the wall. The child is in the center of the picture, and he dwarfs the women behind him. He is wearing a light blue one-piece suit with what appears to be a hood open against his back. He is crying, in the breath-clutching way children have of interspersing deafening wails with heaving, choking silences. His left hand moves toward his open mouth, and he looks, not at the camera, but up and to the right, as if there is someone there, his mother perhaps, whom he is begging to pick him up from the floor, to hold him and to comfort him.

His large, round, dark brown head seems the head of an old man imposed on a baby's body. His suit ends at his knees, and his lower legs are imprisoned in white casts that curve around his ankles and cover his feet, leaving only an opening for his toes. He sits pigeon-toed on the floor, unable to walk or crawl, imploring with his eyes, his tears, his hands, for someone to make his pain go away. The space between the boy and the women behind him is completely bare.

His name is Dakarai, and he is 11 months old. His mother brought him to this Harare church yesterday, after walking through the night and into the morning from the small mining village where they lived. Along the way someone had stolen the blanket that was her only remaining possession, and she arrived in Harare with nothing but the clothes on her body and the baby on her back. She has had almost nothing to eat since she left her village, and now when she tries to feed her baby, no milk comes from her parched and shriveled breasts, and he has had nothing but water for three days. Yet he does not have the look of an undernourished

child, and were it not for the tiny suffocating white casts protruding from the legs of his clean and well-kept light blue suit, you might think only that this was a normal, healthy boy who was having a tantrum because he did not want to be on the church's concrete floor.

Dakarai was born in the Mazowe Valley about 50 kilometers north of Harare. His father, Runako, was the son of a farmer who had gotten a job at the Trojan Nickel Mine. Runako means "handsome," and before he went down regularly into the mines, he must have lived up to his name. But vanity, like the youthful beauty that sustains it, dies swiftly in the mines, where men work 12-hour shifts more than 3,000 feet under the ground. For almost six years, Runako has descended daily into a dank, airless place where he is unable to stand up straight and where the dust stirred up by his own excavations scrapes away the linings of his lungs. Most of his fingers have been mangled by falling pieces of rock, and his lined and leathery face makes him look far older than his 23 years

Runako married a 15-year-old girl from his village. She was the youngest of nine children, and her parents named her Japera, which means "we have finished." Since Runako had come to work and live at the mine when Japera was only nine, he didn't remember her, but their families arranged the marriage, and he was grateful to have someone to cook and clean and to sleep beside him on the wooden bed. He had built the bed himself from some old beams the mine company had discarded a few years ago. He was not a skilled carpenter, but he liked the feel of a hammer in his hands, and when they came to their small house the night after their marriage, he shyly showed his wife the bed. She blushed as she complimented him on his work, set out her few belongings, and hurried out to make a fire and fill the big pot with water.

In the first months after their marriage, the mines were operating around the clock. He worked his shift, rising at three in the morning to find his wife already at the fire, heating the cornmeal *sadza* that was the staple of almost every meal. He sat on the cold concrete floor of their hut and ate without talking. After he had finished eating, she handed him a stone mug of weak tea, and he sat and sipped from it while she prepared corn bread and tea for his lunch. The sun was not yet up when he left to join the line of men heading for the mine entrance. As he walked, he heard the clanging of the elevator that would take them into the earth.

Like all his co-workers, Runako was a member of the national trade union. He knew the local leaders by sight. They were former miners who now worked in an office in the village. Two or three times a year representatives of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions would come out from the headquarters in Harare to talk to the men. They talked of the need for change and the importance of the union in the political process. Runako listened, but all the talk of workers' rights and labor solidarity seemed far away from here and far removed from his life. He voted when they told him to vote and marked his x beside the candidates they told him to support, and then he went home to his supper.

The talk started a month or two ago. At first it was just an undercurrent of rumors that the mine company would lay off workers. He listened, like the others, but he went about his work the same way he always had, rising at three each morning, eating his corn meal and then joining the line of men walking to the elevator. It seemed to him that the same men walked with him to the mine each morning, and that the same men came up on the elevator each evening when their shift was over. So he didn't pay too much attention to the talk about layoffs.

One evening, several weeks after the rumors began, the union leaders called the men on his shift together and told them that the company intended to shut down one of the mines and that some of them would lose their jobs. It is complicated, the leader told them. Powerful people from South Africa and elsewhere, as well as from Harare, control the company, and they are the ones who have decided to close the mines. There is plenty of nickel still here, the leader said. And then he said something Runako didn't really understand, something about how the problem wasn't with the nickel; it was with the government, how all across Zimbabwe a few people were getting rich while the poor people were going hungry.

Runako thought of the people he saw walking almost every day on the road through the village. People called them the travelers, but their gaunt frames and shuffling gaits made them seem more like ghosts than people of the road. They were looking for work, they said, but always they were told that there was no work. Then, without taking their eyes from the dry red dirt of the road, they begged for a piece of bread or a cup of water. If the police were there, they would push the travelers roughly down the road and away from the village. It seemed to Runako that there were more travelers passing through the village begging for work or a piece of bread than there had ever been before. At night he could see the smoke from the fires they made in open camps in the countryside. The people in our village are poor, he thought one evening, but the people out there have nothing.

A few days later the local union leaders called the men together again. They told them an election was coming up, and it was important for everyone to vote if they wanted to keep the mines open and keep their jobs. When they asked for volunteers to help with the elections, Runako raised his hand. At the end of the meeting, the union leaders gathered the volunteers and told them that the election was much more than just a local event. It was to elect a

president of Zimbabwe, and Morgan Tsvangirai, who used to be a leader of the national trade union, was running against Mugabe. He didn't say President Mugabe or even Robert Mugabe. He just spat out the name . . . Mugabe . . . as if it were a bad taste in his mouth, something he had to get rid of.

That scared Runako. He didn't know the name, Morgan Tsvangirai, but he knew Robert Mugabe. For him, Mugabe had always been the country's president. He was Zimbabwe's national hero and its most powerful man. But the union leader said that the people who ran the mines didn't like Mugabe, and that they would close them if Tsvangirai did not win. If that happened, all the men would lose their jobs. As he spoke, a group of barefoot travelers passed by below them. Runako thought of their lives spent wandering the roads, begging for food, homeless and unwelcome wherever they went.

He began to work with the union leaders, telling people in his area about the election and how important it was to vote for Morgan Tsvangirai. He did not get time off from the mines to do this work, nor did he get paid, but for the first time in his life he felt that he was part of something bigger than himself. He believed the leaders when they told him that only the election of Tsvangirai could guarantee that he, Runako, would always have his job in the mines. And that was the only way he could do what a man was supposed to do, which was to provide food for Japera, who was now pregnant.

One of the mines did close not long after the meeting, and some men lost their jobs and were sent away. But Runako continued to go deep into the ground every morning, and when his shift was over, he would spend the evening talking to his neighbors about the elections and the importance of voting for Tsvangirai. He pointed to the mine closing as a sign of what

would happen if Mugabe stayed in power, and the men nodded in agreement, although they too had never known any other president but him.

The baby was born in their small hut. A woman from the village came to help Japeru with the delivery, and Runako went down to the mine as he did every day but Sunday. When he came back, he heard crying from the hut, and he walked in to find Japeru preparing his supper, cradling the baby in her left arm. The boy looked so tiny and fragile that Runako hesitated to take him from Japeru. But when Japeru handed him up to him, and he gently took the baby in both his mangled hands, he felt a surge of joy unlike anything he had ever felt before. They named the baby Dakarai, which means “child brings happiness,” and Runako thought that having a boy was a good omen for the coming election, which was absorbing more and more of his time.

That evening, however, he did not go out to talk to his neighbors about the election. He stayed home. He watched Japeru feed the baby with her full breasts, watched Dakarai instinctively clamp onto the nipple she pushed out to him, listened to the sound his mouth made as he drank. Japeru and Runako didn't say much to each other, but he felt at ease with her in a way he never had with anyone else. At night on the bed, he always fell asleep touching some part of her body, so lightly he wondered if she even noticed, but to him that touch was the conversation he felt too inarticulate to have in words.

With Dakarai, Runako's life seemed to him to be more significant than it had been. He felt the same way about his work with the trade union movement. Now he had to think about more than just supper and the next day at the mine. He had to plan for the future . . . the future of his son, and of course his wife who he hoped would bear him more children, and the future of his country.

He became more careful, too. Working in the mines was dangerous, and there were so many ways it could kill you. A year after he started working there, a beam had collapsed in the mine and eleven men were enclosed in a tomb of stones. He was sent into the mine as part of a team to try to dig the men out. He thought he could hear the men knocking on the walls deep inside the ground, but the mine boss said the search was too dangerous and called it off. The bodies were never recovered, and the families of the dead men had to leave the village.

It wasn't only getting killed that worried him. Anyone who had worked in the mines for any length of time knew that if you stopped paying attention, even for a few seconds, you could get hurt. Many men had lost fingers, and the unlucky ones had lost an arm or even a leg. Miners without legs weren't any use to the Trojan Nickel Mine company, so they became beggars. Their families were evicted from the company-owned huts, and they became beggars too. And those who didn't get killed or hurt, those who kept going down into the mines day after day, sooner or later most of them started coughing. At first it was just a little catch in their throat, but they knew what came next . . . the sudden deep coughs that ripped your lungs, the fighting for breath, the black juice that came up from inside carrying pieces of the walls of your throat. Runako had watched men pawing at the air, seeming to use their arms as pump handles to generate more air in their lungs. But the effort exhausted them, and they just lay there gasping like fish on the deck of a boat.

He didn't talk about it, even with Japera, but secretly Runako hoped that if he worked hard for the union, and they won the elections, he might be able to get out of the mines altogether. He could get an office job, maybe, or even, if things really broke his way, become part of the union leadership. He was young, and he was hardworking and loyal. Maybe more important, he did know how to read and write a little. There had been a mission school near

where he was born, and he had gone to it for three years. And then the old priest who ran it dies suddenly, and no one came to take his place. The building stood empty for several months. After a while people took the few books and other supplies that were in it, and Runako remembered occasionally going into a family's hut and seeing pictures from the books tacked to the walls.

That was the end of school for him, and he never felt confident about his ability to read. But he remembered how he loved to figure out how to make the symbols on the page into sounds that came out of his mouth, how he wondered at the magic of these seemingly meaningless marks to come alive in his mind and on his tongue.

It was true that he didn't know much about the issues of the election, or why one party was better than another. But he knew the local union leaders, and he believed they represented the best hope for his future and the future of his family.

* * * * *

"Some men were here looking for you," Japera said to him one day when he came home from the mine. He had just set down his hard hat and lantern and picked up the baby when she spoke, and he saw that she was shaking.

"Some men?" he said. "What men?"

"Soldiers. Or that's what they said. They looked more like boys. But they had guns and machetes. They talked loudly."

"What did they say? What did they want?"

"They said they wanted to talk to you. That they knew you were working for the union to get people to vote in the election. They said to tell you they were here and they would be back."

Japera and Runako fell silent. Japera walked across the room and stirred the cornmeal with her eyes fixed on the concrete floor. Dakarai quietly burrowed into Runako's chest.

A mine closed a few days later, and then another some weeks after that. Men left, often not knowing where they were going or how they would buy food for their families who had to leave too. Even those who stayed, who still worked the mines every day, found that their wages bought less and less. Now they got their food on credit against their future wages, but every day . . . even every hour . . . their money seemed to be worth less. The food they bought on credit cost three, four, five times as much a few days later, and Runako grew gaunt with worry and lack of food.

After Runako left for the mines each morning, Japera cleaned the mugs and swept the hut's concrete floor. Then she strapped Dakarai on her back and went into the woods looking for food – for plants, for nuts – if she were lucky, she might find the carcass of a porcupine or a shrew that did not yet stink. Japera and Dakarai were not alone in the woods. Nearly every woman and child, and every old and injured man, was scrounging for food and gathering sticks for fuel. In only a few days they had to wander several kilometers from the village just to find anything on the ground, so efficient were the armies of foragers. The woods moved out with them, as the hungry people cut down the remaining trees for fuel and left nothing on the ground they could not use.

When he came up from the mine, Runako too went in search of food and fuel. He no longer thought so much about the hopes he had for his son, for his country, for his future. He needed food and wood just to keep his small family alive and to give him enough strength to keep going into the mines. He feared if he grew too weak from hunger that he would get the cough. Then he would be unable to work, and he and his family would have to leave. He still

canvassed for the union, and if he allowed himself to hope at all, it was that the elections would change everything. The closed mines would open again. The store would have enough food. His money would be able to buy things again.

Bands of men and boys came regularly to the half-empty village. Some looked no older than 10 or 11, but they all carried weapons of some kind – guns, machetes, clubs, iron bars. At first they came during the day when most of the men were in the mines. They swaggered menacingly down the dry dirt road that went through the village, pushing people out of their way, threatening them with their weapons. One day they roused the women and children and old men from their huts and herded them roughly to the store. When all the people of the village were gathered, they dragged the storekeeper from behind the counter, down the wood steps and out onto the hard dirt road. One of the men held a knife to his throat.

“This man,” he shouted, “is robbing you. He hoards his food in other places, so that you will be hungry and pay more for the stinking garbage he sells you.”

Some in the crowd murmured in agreement. So that was why there was no food, why they had to scour the land miles from here while their children cried.

“We must get rid of these scum,” the man with the knife said. “They work only for the colonialists who rob you and want to enslave the people of Zimbabwe again. They are agents for the British who want to drive out Robert Mugabe, who fights to protect your freedom and to give you food. Before a hero like Mugabe, a man like this is a maggot.”

And with a slow movement of his right hand and a steady smile on his face, he cut a deep gash down the storekeeper’s right cheek, from his ear almost to his mouth, and threw him to the ground, where others kicked him and beat him with sticks, while he tried to cover his head and the blood made rivulets on the hard ground.

“We are all around here,” the man shouted, waving his knife in an arc above his head. “We are watching everyone, and we know who the enemies of an independent Zimbabwe are. We will come back for them.”

When Runako came back to the hut that evening, Japera told him what had happened that day. He took a little cornbread and wrapped it in a palm leaf. He looked across the room toward Japera, although his eyes were fixed on the floor.

“I need to be away from here for a little while,” he said.

“Where will you go?” she asked. “What if those men come back?”

“I will be ok,” he said. Don’t worry. This will end, and everything will be fine again. But,” he added, “if the something does happen while I am gone, go to the union leaders and ask them to help you.” He looked tenderly at Dakarai asleep on the bed, and then he silently left the hut.

The next evening the men came. There were eight or nine of them, armed with guns and clubs and knives. They walked noisily up to the hut and pushed their way in until they filled the room. As Japera trembled in a corner, Dakarai was awakened by the noise. He lay on the bed, rubbing his round almond eyes, and looked around for his mother. When he saw her in the corner, he reached out to her and cried softly in hunger.

“Where is your husband?” one of the men demanded. He was the same man Japera had watched cut the face of the storekeeper.

She could only shake her head.

“Tell us,” he said, standing over her, absently fingering the blade of his knife.

“I don’t know,” she said so softly they could not hear her across the room.

The man stepped toward her and raised the knife. He stared at her. She looked down, and he lowered his hand.

“We’ll be back,” said. And the men left.

As soon as they had gone, Japera rushed over, snatched up Dakarai, and held him so desperately that he began to whimper. She tried to feed him, but her breasts gave no milk. She sat with him and listened to the gangs go into other huts. Sometimes she heard screams, and the silence that followed terrified her.

When she could hear the gangs no longer, she put down Dakarai and went and gathered what little food there was in the hut and wrapped it in palm leaves. Then she picked up her child and walked noiselessly to the door and out into the night. She did not know where she was going or what she would do, but she was too scared to spend the night in her hut alone. “Where is Runako?” she thought as she made her way toward the trees in the distance.

Out in the darkness under a starless sky, Japera found no respite from her fears. As she walked, she listened for the sound of wild animals, including packs of dogs that people could no longer keep that now roamed the edges of the camp at night, as hungry as the families they had left behind. More intently, she listened for the bands of roving men who she feared would kill her.

The next morning, after a night spent wandering in the dark, she came back to her hut and set out a few small sticks to make a fire. She put a pot of water on the flame, and while she waited for it to boil, she tried without success to give milk to her baby. She gave him instead some warm water in a stone mug, and while she was humming him to sleep in her lap, she heard men coming toward her door.

She stood quickly and put Dakarai on the bed, under the one blanket she still had, and retreated to the corner as the men came in, unbidden.

The same leader, with the knife, looked around. He saw Japera and he saw Dakarai lying beneath the blanket on the bed.

“Where is your husband?” he demanded.

Japera said nothing, only shook her head.

The man walked toward Japera. He had the same cold smile as he had when he cut the storekeeper. The men behind him were smiling too. Some laughed expectantly. She had heard what the men did to other women in their huts. She instinctively made herself small, as if she could become invisible. The laughing and jeering penetrated her and suddenly she remembered the terror she felt at the shriek of a hyena outside her parents’ house when she was a child.

The man stopped moving toward her. The smile never left his face as he turned nimbly toward the bed, snatched up Dakarai and in one motion hurled him to the concrete floor.

For a moment the hut was filled with silence, the smiles still frozen on the faces of the now motionless men. Then from Dakarai came a scream that was so piercing the walls of the hut seemed to shake. Japera leapt up from her place in the corner and snatched Dakarai to her breast. She didn’t see the men, didn’t hear them as they turned without a word and left her home. She heard nothing but Dakarai’s convulsive, choking sobs and felt only his shattered legs against her empty breasts.

She sat there for hours, too terrified to move. She waited fearfully for the men to come back, to kill Dakarai and then stay and take their turns with her. Once or twice her thoughts turned to Runako, and she wondered where he was, whether he was safe. She knew now that

if these men who would smilingly hurl her baby to the concrete floor found him, they would kill him. She thought of gently smothering Dakarai into her breast, to stop his sobs, to heal his pain, to save him from all the misery of the world. But she held him gently, trying not to touch his legs. She still was unable to feed him although he clung desperately to her nipple, trying to suck out something that would ease the pain.

Finally, he cried himself into a fretful sleep. Japera stood and wrapped her baby in her blanket. She put him gingerly on her back and went out of the hut. She looked around in the gathering dusk and, seeing no one, set off for the road to Harare. She walked, too scared to stop even though she felt almost too tired to go on. She just wanted to lie by the side of the road and fall asleep. On her back, Dakarai would wake up and cry in hunger and in agony, but the pain soon overwhelmed him and he passed back into an agitated sleep. She walked for hours, ducking down into the roadside ditch if she heard anyone coming.

By the time Japera reached the outskirts of the capital, the striated rays of dawn creased the eastern sky. The heat was already building and she had no water. She joined other women walking in from the countryside, women who had also fled their homes and left behind all the possessions they could not carry. Many of them were going to Harvest House, where the trade union party had its headquarters, and she joined in with them, trudging wordlessly along, trying to be inconspicuous. She was too exhausted to think of anything but getting to a place where she and Dakarai would be safe. Then she would find out what to do about Dakarai's legs.

She tried to think about what had happened, but her mind refused to focus. Images would come to her – of Dakarai sleeping on the bed, of the men coming in, of what they looked like, what they said to her. She tried to picture the man picking up her baby and

hurling him to the floor. But the scenes wouldn't stay fixed in her mind. She would conjure one up, try to see it clearly – to see, for example, the look on the man's face as he threw Dakarai or to remember what the men behind him said – but she could not make her mind stay in one place. It jumped to the screams of her child moments after he had hit the floor or to the sudden silence in the room after the men had left the hut.

“Why did he do it?” she said aloud several times to herself. But it was more an invocation than a question. She didn't have an answer. She couldn't even fathom what an answer could be to such a question. It had happened. She had seen him do it. She had watched him come toward her and had cowered in the corner, waiting for him to grab her and throw her to the floor, when suddenly he had reached over and picked up Dakarai, and without saying a word, he had smashed her baby's body onto the concrete floor.

That image – of blurred motion and the sound of her child hitting the floor, and then, for a moment, just silence followed by his heart-rending screams – raced over and over through her mind. She couldn't stop it. And she couldn't change it. And so fully did it occupy her mind that she could think of nothing else as she put one foot in front of the other.

It was bedlam at Harvest House. A woman directed Japera to a hospital three blocks away. There a nurse in a dirty white coat took Japera and Dakarai into a small room and told them to wait for the doctor. Then she left and closed the door behind her. After a long time the door opened and a man walked in. He barely looked at Japera and went to Dakarai and roughly pulled up his pant legs. He didn't ask what had happened. He just poked at the two legs. He ignored the baby's agonized screams when he pulled them straight.

The screams ripped into Japera, bringing with them a cascade of images of the men standing in her hut, the smirk of the leader as he approached her, the sight of her son lying

writhing on the floor. Yet she made no move toward Dakarai, just sat helplessly as he screamed and lurched toward her and beseeched her with despairing eyes, while the doctor held his legs.

A nurse came in and helped the doctor wrap Dakarai's legs in wet white plaster. Then she gave the baby a shot to ease the pain and told Japera that when the boy had fallen asleep from the drug, she should take him to the church next door. The nurse then cut three small white pills in half, wrapped the six pieces in a small piece of gauze, which she handed to Japera.

"These are for the pain," she said in a brusque and hurried voice. "It is all we have for you, so only use them when you cannot get him to sleep. Bring him back in a week so we can check his casts."

Then she gently touched Japer's shoulder.

"Good luck," she said.

Japera was not yet seventeen. She had not seen nor heard from Runako since he had left that June night, which now seemed so long ago. She felt sure that the men had found him and killed him. She hoped they had killed him quickly and without a lot of pain. She had witnessed so much pain in the last few weeks that she could not bear to think of her husband being tortured by men with no hearts. But she had no illusions any more. She knew that these men inflicted pain carelessly and that Runako's death would come to them as a disappointment.

My story was fiction, based on the story published in the June 26, 2008, edition of The New York Times. The Times published the following on July 9, 2008.

Editors' Note: July 9, 2008 A front-page picture caption on June 26 describing an 11-month-old boy whose legs were in casts stated that his legs were broken and that his mother said the injuries were caused by an episode of state-sponsored violence in Zimbabwe. After the picture and an accompanying article that also described the injuries were published, The New York Times took the boy to a medical clinic in Harare for help. When the casts were removed, medical workers there discovered the boy had club feet. Doctors said on Monday that X-rays of the baby's legs showed no evidence of bone fractures.

The mother subsequently admitted that she had exaggerated injuries she said had been sustained by the boy during an attack by governing party militia. In multiple interviews, she said that youths backing President Robert Mugabe had thrown her son to the concrete floor — and she still says that event did occur.

The owner of the house where she and the baby were staying confirmed that marauding youths from the governing party had attacked the house. He said he believed the baby had been thrown to the floor during the attack, but the owner was in a different room and did not witness it firsthand. The landlord, other lodgers, neighbors and opposition supporters also confirmed that the mother had been singled out because her husband was an opposition member.

The mother, however, later told *The Times* that the boy had been wearing casts even at the time of the attack, as part of a treatment he had received for his club feet at a different medical facility. She said she misrepresented the boy's injuries to generate help because she could not afford corrective surgery for the boy.

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