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David van Reen

Angels of Revenge

Original title: *Engelen der wraake*

NOVEL

Penetrating novel about two sisters in a Kenyan slum

A hard, uncompromising world in which the inhabitants can still hope, drawing on friendship, trust and faith

About the author

David van Reen (1969) was an avid sportsman when a serious car accident put an end to his career. He miraculously awoke from a coma, learned how to walk again, and battled through a difficult period. As a trainer of African runners, he became directly and thoroughly acquainted with Africa's fascinating culture and people. He runs the Pure People Travel agency with an Ethiopian partner.

In 2008 his photo-journalism book, 'Country of Burnt Faces. Life in Ethiopia' (*Het land van de verbrande gezichten*), was published, a reflection of his perspective on Ethiopia. The portraits are human landscapes in which the viewer can discover traces of every facet of life. The landscapes and events are agents that continuously shape the people.

Van Reen is very much involved in current developments in Africa, and started writing prose based on this commitment. 'Angels of Revenge' (*Engelen der wrake*) is his debut novel.

www.david-van-reen.nl



About the book

Beatrice lives with her two daughters in a small compound in a slum area of Nairobi. She earns just enough to get by and to send her fourteen-year-old daughter Vellah to school by selling grilled corncoobs, while a girl from the neighbourhood looks after little Nancy. One day, Beatrice is knocked down by a white BMW, and dies at the scene.

The two girls are now left to look after themselves. From sheer necessity, Vellah goes on the streets to sustain them. She enters a world in which the law is that of the survival of the fittest. A jungle in which you can only exist if you adhere to the tough rules.

When Vellah meets Godfrey, she discovers that he is the heartless killer of her mother. She is out for revenge.

With unrelenting directness, David van Reen confronts the reader with the living conditions of Nairobi and its slums. The ruthless gangs, the corrupt politics, the widespread extortion practices, the dubious influence of white aid workers – it is an unimaginable world in which the inhabitants nevertheless take hope drawn from friendship, trust and faith.

David van Reen, Engelen der wrake
ISBN 978 90 445 1297 7
Hardcover, 256 p.
Date of Publication: 14 April 2009

Relation to social developments

Kenya has a troubled past. It gained independence on 12 December 1963, with Kenyatta as president. After his death in 1978 he was succeeded by Daniel Arap Moi, who was re-elected a total of four times. At the beginning of the nineties, tribal conflicts arose, whereby thousands died and tens of thousands were made homeless. The 1997 elections were plagued by corruption and fraud, but Moi was elected again. For the elections of 27 December 2002 Moi was not eligible for re-election, and opposition leader Mwai Kibaki became president. After his second election victory in December 2007, Kibaki was severely criticised because of fraud and accusations of ethnic cleansing.

Recent research by UNICEF showed that no less than a third of children on the Kenyan coast were forced into prostitution through poverty. It is estimated that 1.3 million Kenyans are infected with HIV. Girls in particular are suffering: those between 15 and 19 years of age have seven times the risk of infection as boys of the same age.

The Press about 'Country of Burnt Faces. Life in Ethiopia':

'The photographs of people and their lives are beautiful. (...) A warm tribute to a beautiful and strong people.' – *NBD/Biblion*

Fragment of the book

In the street, Vellah takes a *matatu*.

It's as though time is standing still. She no longer notices the sounds of the crowd or the busy traffic.

The *matatu* stops too often. More and more young women get in. They're all going Down Town to earn money.

They drive up the incline. Along the streets, in the small shops and in the tourist souvenir market where during the day hundreds of people sell their wares, everything is desolate. The only sign of life are the vultures that have descended to have their fill of the rubbish in the street.

A man, enveloped in plastic sheets, shuffles across the dark market terrain. Like the vultures, he is in search of leftover food.

At the fork, to the right on Moi Avenue, the police headquarters of Down Town Nairobi. Immediately after the fork the *matatu* stops, at the left side of the bus stop. The girls get out. Including Vellah.

Down Town is busy and oppressive. There is a forbidding atmosphere. On the street, sunglasses and CDs are on sale. And locks, of every size and type.

Vellah looks from the small city park, Uhuru, to the street in which Parkside Hotel is located. It is an extension of Koinange Street, the most visited red light street of Nairobi. The first girls are already there.

This is where she started soliciting. She was fifteen. She didn't want to do it, but there was no alternative. They were hungry. It was dangerous then to work in Koinange Street, and still is. The competition is killing. The prices are low and it is dangerous to go with a man who doesn't have much money. The girls are often assaulted.

Of the girls who don't come back, it is said that they have been murdered, but no one tells the truth. There are often rows between the girls. They don't want to have much to do with each other. They are all fighting for themselves.

In the beginning, she often stood opposite Pizzeria Napoli. She watched the clientele coming and going. The restaurant was always well patronised by *mzungos*. Businessmen and staff from the embassies in Nairobi. And a lot of tourists. Vellah scored mainly young black businessmen. They were in a hurry. Whites often wanted her for a whole night and paid better. On the second floor there was a terrace. She always walked within sight of the terrace, on the other side of the street. She was fascinated, especially by the beautiful well-dressed women in the company of rich whites. They always had beautiful black women with them. She knew one of the girls from Kibera. Cathy had attended the same primary school as she had, one class above. She stood out at that time with her beauty and arrogance. The owner of the pizzeria, the somewhat older Italian, Massimo, sat every evening around eleven o'clock with friends on the terrace. Usually in the company of beautiful, tall Kalenjin women. Cathy was often with them. Around midnight, they left the pizzeria to spend the night elsewhere.

She was envious of Cathy. She wanted to be a success like her. She knows now that she is not in the same league. Cathy, with her long hair and grey eyes, was one of the best girls. But where is she? Vellah hasn't seen her for about a year. Maybe she's gone to Europe or Australia with a white man. Has realised the dream of all the girls.