



## ***When the Lion Roars***

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### **Chapter 1**

Paul Farid drew in a breath and held it, the magnificence of the unfolding springtime terrain filling his senses. Captivated with the lush earth below him, he scanned the area for signs of government soldiers who might have his plane in their sights. He could see for miles across the vast southern Sudan. Herds of gazelle, antelope, and zebra, along with an occasional lion, dotted the plain; some finding shelter from the scorching sun beneath a lone tree while others raced aimlessly about. Birds scattered in a rush of flapping wings, rising above the tall grass into a cloud and soaring gracefully across the sky until they found another spot to roost. A tingling fluttered in Paul's stomach. The sensation greeted him every time he flew over Sudan. The mystery and splendor lured him in, like an intoxicating spell that refused to let him go. He was the intruder, the only one who had not dwelt among the southern Sudanese for centuries.

Paul did not intend to lose his Mitsubishi MU2—a twin engine, turboprop aircraft, the missionary cream of the crop—to any Muslim bent on destroying or confiscating food and medical supplies targeted for the needy civilians. Sometimes Feed the World—FTW—had Khartoum's permission to deliver provisions to the starving masses caught in the civil war strife, but not today. Despite the danger, Paul brought aid to the village of Warkou in the province of Bahr Al Ghazal, district of Aweil. It lay along the Lol River in a setting so breathtaking that it rivaled man's thoughts of paradise. He had committed to help those affected by the government's genocide in this beautiful but turbulent land.

The countryside looked peaceful, serene, as though untouched by the forces that could erupt at any moment into an explosion of violence and mayhem aimed at the innocent. Not far to the east, the White Nile snaked through Sudan. Some called the river the lifeblood of the country; others claimed the waterway as the entrance to Eden. To the inhabitants, it served as a symbol of hope.

Just to the west of the plane a worn path would serve as Paul's landing strip. A few cows and goats ambled in the middle until the jet-sounding engine seized their attention. At the sound of the aircraft's high-pitched screams, the animals scrambled. Paul focused his attention beyond the makeshift landing strip and noted the grass huts of Warkou, meaning "bend of the river." There he planned to deliver the much-needed supplies. Paul peered closer to view the several craters below. How many had been killed or wounded in the latest bombing? Not a single person roamed beneath him. When the distinct hum of a plane alerted the villagers, they ran for bomb shelters. He did not blame them. They had learned to keep their mouths open so as not to damage their ears from the concussion of the bombs and to run for shelter when the bombing and shooting started, but many still became casualties. Nothing saved their churches, schools, and medical clinics. The bombs were crude—metal drums filled with explosives and metal—destined to inflict maximum death and destruction.

With the area cleared before him, Paul put down the flaps to add to the wing area and cruised over the rough landing strip. He studied the area in all directions for debris and ruts along the dirt path, taking special note of blowing dust to calculate the direction of the wind. He laughed at three cows headed in different directions from the incoming plane. In the next instant, he circled the area and repeated his inspection.

Certain of flying into the wind, he snatched up his landing checklist with his left hand and gripped the control wheel. With both feet on the rudders, Paul used his right hand to quickly maneuver across the cockpit and flip switches and levers in a steady, organized flow. Once completed, he ran through the checklist, then replaced it in a tight, upper-left-hand corner until needed again. No matter how experienced the pilot, one little mistake could make the difference between a safe landing and tragedy.

"Here we go." Adrenaline raced through Paul's veins. He loved flying, but he loved his mission and the God who had called him to serve the southern Sudanese more. The cost did not matter, only the purpose.

At the beginning of the runway, he placed the landing gear switch in the down position. The speed of his plane decreased and created tremendous wind noise inside the aircraft. He lowered the airspeed to 130 knots, then down to 110, using the precision necessary for a smooth, safe landing. When the wheels touched down, dirt and dust flew everywhere, alerting the countryside of his presence. If the Government of Sudan—GOS—soldiers were in the area, they now had no doubt of his location.

Once the engine ceased its earsplitting hum, Paul doublechecked his procedures before climbing from the cockpit and taking shelter under one of the wings. He wiped his forehead, already beaded with sweat.

“Hello,” he called to the still unseen villagers. He knew they understood Arabic. “I have food and medical supplies from Feed the World.” His gaze swept over every hut and tree in the area, knowing that those who hid among them heard every word but were afraid to show their faces. He would be fearful too. “I need to speak to Dr. Larson Kerr.”

From behind a hut an elderly man appeared, then three more men and two women. Slowly more people crept forward with mothers and children lagging behind.

“Greetings from Feed the World.” He waved, grinning. “Is Dr. Kerr available?”

“Yes, I’m here.” A woman stepped from the group. Shorter than the towering Dinkas, her ruddy complexion and thick mass of sandy-colored hair, worn in a ponytail, immediately set her apart from the ebony-skinned, dark-haired villagers native to this land.

Larson Kerr was a woman?

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