



Where Witch Birds Fly

Eugene Harkins

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This novel permits insight into the strange and horrific civil war that erupted in Sierra Leone in the 1990s in the twilight of the Cold War, leading ultimately to a UN War Crimes Tribunal for Crimes Against Humanity. It captures the toxic brew of forces that ultimately unleashed a conflagration in this small West African nation Big Oil, Big Diamonds, competing external powers, foreign mercenaries, and the local dominant Lebanese trading community all pillaging and degrading the African population's assets and destroying its chances for development until, not surprisingly, a brutal insurrection breaks out. The protagonist, Richard White, is an African-American international lawyer who first arrives in Sierra Leone during the Cold War on a mission to collect a forty million dollar oil debt owed by the local Freetown refinery. He returns a second time, post-Cold War, representing Lebanese interests in the largely illicit diamond trade, only to be kidnapped and held for ransom by Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front. Where Witch Birds Fly is also and not less so an illuminated portrayal of White's process of loss and redemption. An outwardly successful man, White is in actuality seeking to come to terms with the personal malaise brought about by his rejection of family and ethnic heritage. He travels through life with all the accoutrements that demonstrate his professional success sharp clothes, fast cars, and flashy white women but inside, he feels troubled and alone. Long-term psychoanalysis does little to alleviate his malaise. White's road to peace lies through the maelstrom. Harkins projects the deadly social forces at play in Sierra Leone over a decade with the sociopolitical acumen and high moral vision of John Le Carre in The Constant Gardner.



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