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Opening extract from

# Gorilla Dawn

Written by

**Gill Lewis**

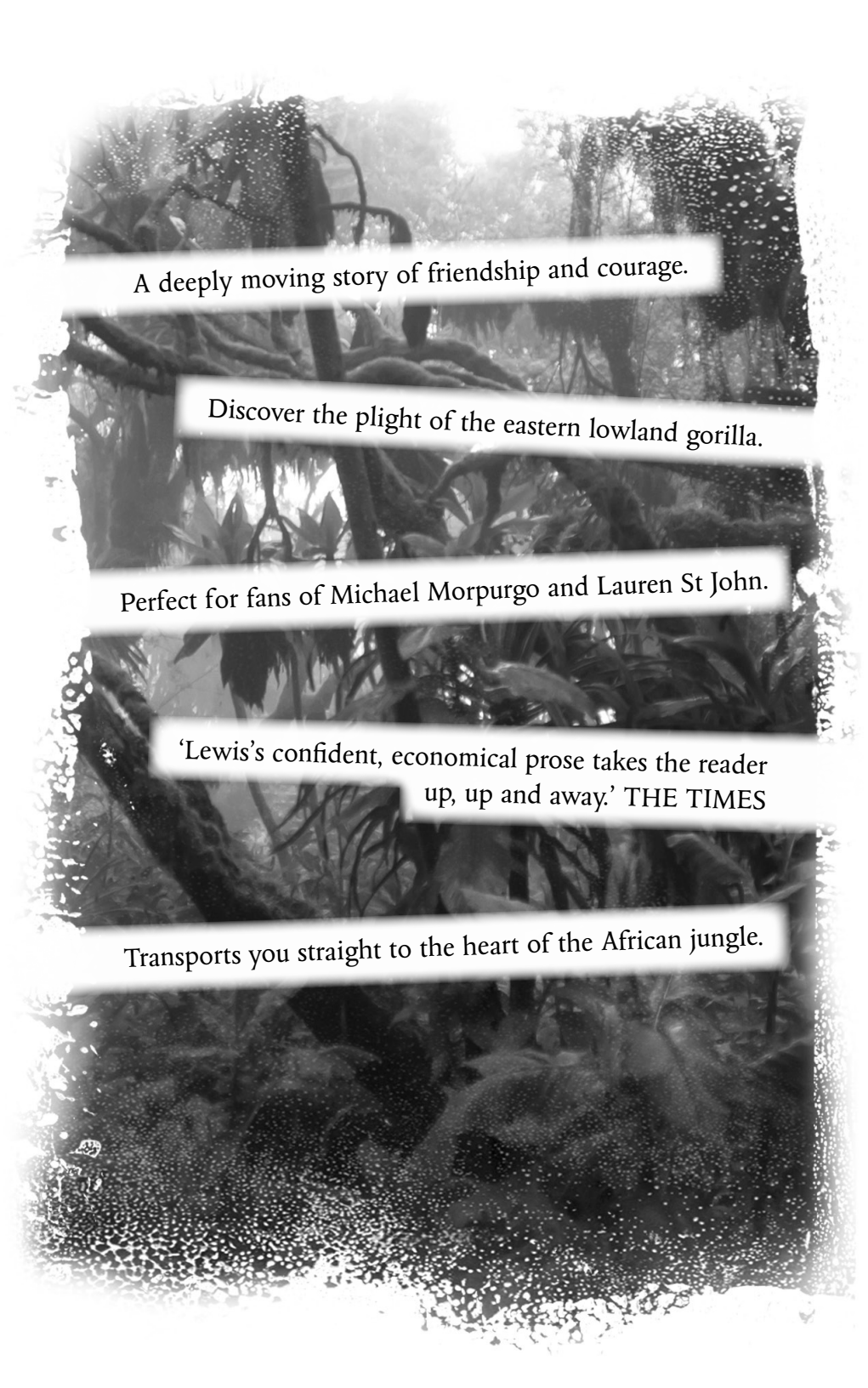
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A deeply moving story of friendship and courage.
Discover the plight of the eastern lowland gorilla.
Perfect for fans of Michael Morpurgo and Lauren St John.
'Lewis's confident, economical prose takes the reader up, up and away.' THE TIMES
Transports you straight to the heart of the African jungle.

'*Gorilla Dawn* is excellent. From the start, you get to know the characters as if they were family as they travel through dramatic scenes and tear-jerking episodes. The story made me laugh and cry, and it made my emotions flow through me at the end.'

***Stephen, 12***

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'*Gorilla Dawn* was wonderfully engaging and one of the best books I've ever read. By the end I felt I knew all the characters like I had met them in person. If it isn't sitting there on your book shelf, you are seriously missing out!'

***Abi, 12***

- - - - -

'Yet another sensational book by Gill Lewis! Page after page of excitement and thrill that will keep you entertained for hours on end.'

***Harry, 14***

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'*Gorilla Dawn* is an amazing book! It was so engaging, making you want to turn the page for more. The characters were so realistic, I felt like I knew them in person.'

***Isabella, 12***

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'From the moment I started to the very end I was gripped by the storyline and I couldn't wait to see what happened to the gorilla troop. This is one of the best books that Gill Lewis has written!'

***Charlotte, 12***

- - - - -

'A haunting and touching read exploring friendships in the most unexpected situations. A must read for all animal lovers (and anyone else)!'

***Georgia, 12***

# Gorilla Dawn

Gill Lewis

OXFORD
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To the thin green line:
The men and women rangers who risk their lives
protecting wildlife and wild places for us all.

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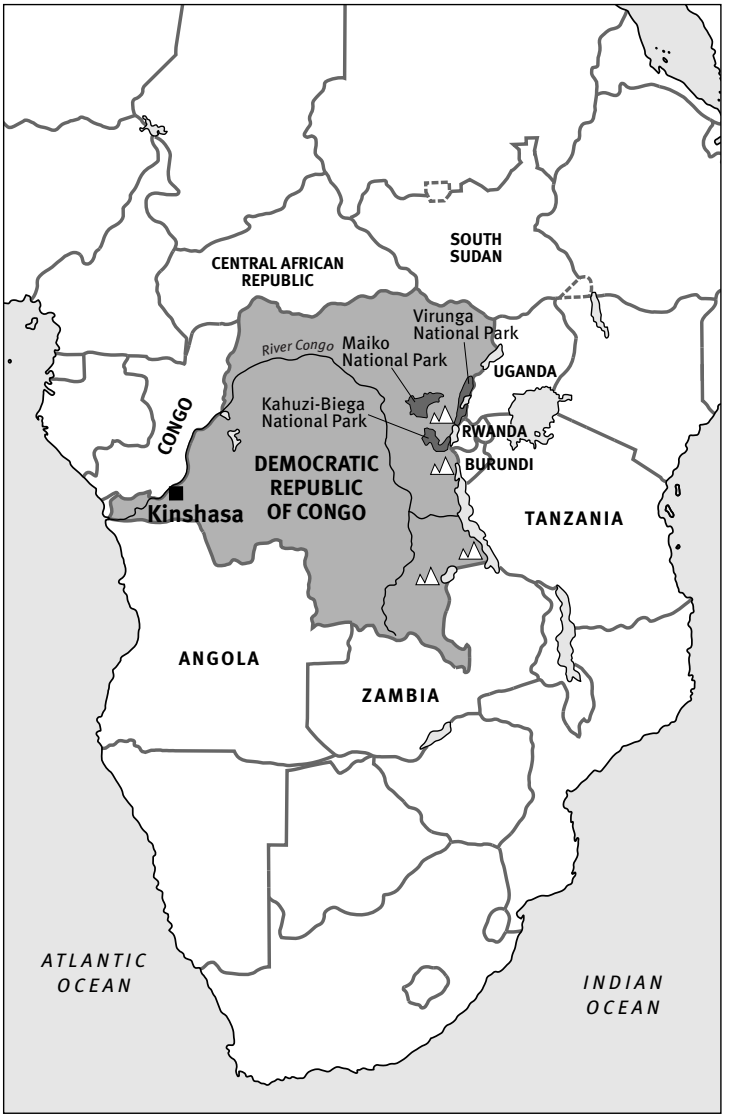
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In the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo lie areas of forested wilderness that are home to the eastern lowland gorilla. Beneath the canopy, the forests support an extraordinary diversity of life, from rare plants to forest elephants. Yet, beneath the soil, they have the highest concentration of mineral resources found anywhere on earth; minerals which continue to fuel internal conflict and world greed.

These forests drive our global weather patterns. They regulate the air we breathe and the water we drink. They give life to those living on the forests' edges and those who live thousands of miles away.

They are essential to us all.

And yet, they are at risk of being lost for ever.

These forests are where this story begins . . .

'When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.'

*John Muir (1838–1914)*

PART ONE

# THEN . . .

*YOU ARE MINE, IMARA.*

*THE DAY THEY CUT YOU OPEN, I*
*CLIMBED INSIDE.*
*KEEP ME SAFE IN HERE, AND I WILL*
*MAKE YOU STRONG.*
*IF YOU LET ME OUT, THEY WILL SEE*
*YOUR WEAKNESS AND YOU WILL DIE.*
*YOU CANNOT LIVE WITH ME, YET YOU*
*CANNOT SURVIVE WITHOUT ME.*

*YOU ARE MINE, IMARA.*
*YOU ARE THE DEVIL'S CHILD.*



## CHAPTER ONE
# IMARA

*IT IS TIME, IMARA.*

Imara left the shadows and stepped into the pool of moonlight, listening to the demon as he paced inside her mind.

*IT IS TIME, IMARA. THE MEN ARE WAITING FOR YOU. THEY ARE WAITING FOR YOUR POWER TO PROTECT THEM.*

She knelt down and poured the contents of her water bottle into the ashes of last night's fire, stirring with her fingers, working the mixture into a gritty paste.

All around her, the forest was dark and still, wrapped in silence. Nothing moved. High above in the canopy, a pale mist clung to the leaves. Thin tendrils of vapour hung in the

air, as if the trees were holding their breath, waiting for the dawn.

The Black Mamba and his men were folded into the deep moon-shadows. Only the cold light catching the metal of their rifles told they were not of this place.

*COME ON, IMARA*, hissed the demon. *THEY'RE WATCHING YOU.*

Imara's hands hovered over the ash paste and trembled.

*STUPID GIRL. DON'T SHOW YOUR FEAR. YOU KNOW WHAT THEY'LL DO IF THEY SEE YOUR FEAR.*

Imara breathed in deeply, filling her lungs with the cool night air. She tried to block her mind from the purpose of her task. She hummed softly, trying to ignore the demon and scooped the ash paste into her hand.

*HURRY, IMARA. THEY WANT TO SEE THEIR SPIRIT CHILD.*

She worked faster, scraping more wet ash from the middle of the fire, squeezing it in her fists, letting the water run out between her fingers. She began to smear the ash paste, covering the raised scar that cut her face in two. She traced its hard ragged surface from her forehead, across her cheek to her lower jaw. The scar had long-since healed, sealing the demon deep inside, but its tightness pulled her mouth into a twisted scowl.

She could feel the ash mixture dry and harden like a shell. Next, she smeared the ash paste on her bare arms, painting long sinuous bodies of snakes from her shoulders to her wrists. As the ash dried, it glowed white in the moonlight, bright against her dark skin.

The Black Mamba stepped out from the trees. He was a big man, thick-necked, like a bull buffalo. His anger was unpredictable like one, too. He rolled up his sleeve and thrust his arm in front of Imara. Her eyes came to rest on the snake-bone amulet around his wrist, the snake from which the Black Mamba took his name. 'Protect me, Imara,' he whispered.

Imara dipped her fingers into the ash and traced a snake along his forearm, curling the tail into a spiral. 'It is done,' she said. 'The spirits will look after you. No one can harm you now.'

The Black Mamba nodded and stood up. 'Now safeguard my men.'

The men lined up to have their arms painted with her dark magic , but none of them dared look Imara in the eye. She was the Black Mamba's Spirit Child. She talked with the devil and walked within the spirit world. The spirits protected her. She had been bitten by a black mamba and lived.

'Come,' said the Black Mamba. He held up his arm, the ash snake glowing bright in the darkness. 'It is time to take back what is ours.'

Imara followed the Black Mamba and his men to the forest edge. She squeezed her eyes tight shut and gripped the barrel of her gun, the metal cold against her skin. She focused on the sounds of the waking forest, on the leaves rippling in a fresh breeze above her and the chorus of birds. She tried to control her breathing, slowing her breath so she could taste the damp, earthy air. She tried to ignore the demon kicking inside her chest.

But the demon would not be quiet.

*OPEN YOUR EYES, IMARA.*

The demon beat his fists against her chest. Thump . . . thump . . . thump.

*OPEN YOUR EYES, IMARA! THEY ARE NOT LIKE US. THEY ARE WEAK. THEY DESERVE TO DIE.*

Imara forced her eyes open and stared down to the village in the valley below. The sun had not yet risen above the mountains. Small fires flickered in the pale dawn light. Villagers moved between the huts, the reds and yellows of women's skirts bright in the blue mist of early morning. The bleats of goats and the steady pounding of cassava carried up the hillside. Wood smoke drifted across the fields

bringing the smell of roasting corn to the forest edge where Imara crouched, concealed in darkness.

She made a circle with her finger and thumb, and held it to her eye. She looked through to see the village, cupping it within her hand. She tried to hold the image, as if she could somehow protect it in her memory, protect the villagers from what was to come.

But it was a new day.

A new dawn.

On the eastern horizon, a crimson light was bleeding into the sky. The villagers below were unaware of the girl at the edge of the forest, the girl with a gun and necklace of bullets. They were unaware of the Black Mamba and his men beside her. Unaware many of them would not live to see the sun rising above the mountains.