

A Long Walk to Water

by Linda Sue Park

Late in the day, the villagers arrived at the rebel camp. The soldiers ordered them to separate into two groups- men in one group, women and children and the elderly in the other. Teenage boys, it seemed, were considered men, for boys who looked to be only a few years older than Salva were joining the men's group.

Salva hesitated for a moment. He was only eleven, but he was the son of an important family. He was Salva Mawien Dut Ariik, from the village named for his grandfather. His father always told him to act like a man- to follow the example of his older brothers and in turn, set a good example for Kuol.

Salva took a few steps toward the men.

"Hey!"

A soldier approached Salva and raised his gun.

Salva froze. All he could see was the gun's huge barrel, black and gleaming, as it moved toward his face.

The end of the barrel touched his chin.

Salva felt his knees turn to water. He closed his eyes.

If I die now, I will never see my family again.

Somehow, this thought strengthened him enough to keep him from collapsing in terror.

He took a deep breath and opened his eyes.

The soldier was holding the gun with only one hand. He was not *aiming it*; he was using it to lift Salva's chin so he could get a better look at his face.

"Over there," the soldier said. He moved the gun and pointed it toward the group of women and children.

“You are not a man yet. Don’t be in such a hurry!” He laughed and clapped Salva on the shoulder.

Salva scurried over to the women’s side.