

## Moses

*\*This is a fictional story.*

“Moses, hurry! The rebels are coming.”

I glanced around the mud hut my family called home. Where was Koo? She wasn't in the hut. I ran outside. I had to find my sister. That's when I remembered she had gone to draw water. I spotted her coming up the dirt path behind the house carrying the tin pail on her head.

“Koo, the rebels! Hurry!”

She quickly pulled the pail from her head, dumped the water into the bushes, and ran to meet me at the house. We would need the water later, but there was no way we could hurry fast enough carrying a full pail of water.

I grabbed Koo's hand, and we followed our mama deep into the African bush. I didn't know where we were going, and I had a suspicion my mama didn't either. But after moving four times in ten years to flee the rebels, I'd learned to trust her. If she didn't know where we were going now, she would by the time we got there.

Life wasn't fair. There were children in the cities who got to eat three meals every day, meals of jollof rice, plantains, vegetables, and salads. We never had food like that. Many days we didn't have food at all, even though our mama worked like a slave every day. Her boss was cruel. Sometimes he hurt her; sometimes he wouldn't pay her. Now that we had to flee, she wouldn't work for him anymore, but the thought did not make me feel any better. There would be another employer to take his place. There always was, and every one of them was the same.

Koo shook my arm.

I jerked it away, startled.

“Moses, did you hear me?”

“No.”

“You’re angry again. Your eyes are flashing like lightning.”

“Why shouldn’t I be angry? At least we had a place to sleep at the hut. I don’t know where we are going or where we will sleep when we get there.”

“Why does that make you mad?”

I had to laugh when she said that, but it wasn’t a good kind of laugh. She was only six. What did she know of people?

I kept my eyes fixed straight ahead on our mama as I answered her. “You’ll learn there are lots of reasons to be angry. I hate how our mama’s boss treats her; I hate the rebels for destroying our lives and making us move all the time. I hate not having a home or a father, and I hate being hungry all the time.”

When Koo said nothing, I turned to see what was wrong. Her enormous brown eyes were staring at me and swimming in pools of tears. I wasn’t sure why, but the sight made me even angrier.

I looked back to our mama.

“Don’t cry,” I barked at Koo. “It’s no use.”

I felt a twinge in my heart. I shouldn’t be angry with her, and I shouldn’t talk to her like that. But what else could I do? If she cried, I didn’t know if I could keep from joining her. It was safer to just stay angry.

We hurried on until we could go no further. Mama found a large rock in the shade of a mahogany tree where we could rest. The moment she sat down, she screamed and fell forward off the rock.

I ran to her. “Mama, what’s wrong?”

## **Let's Talk About Liberia**

Have you ever heard of a nation called Liberia? If you look on a map, you'll see it is a country in Western Africa. It sits right at the bottom of the hump of Africa that juts out into the Atlantic Ocean. It is sandwiched between Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone.

It's a small nation, just a little bigger than the state of Tennessee. It has two main seasons, very hot, dry winters and wet summers when the rain turns everything into mud. Liberia is one of the poorest countries in the world, even though it is home to industries and natural resources such as rubber, coffee, cocoa, rice, cassava, iron ore, timber, and diamonds.

But where did this nation, whose name comes from the Latin word for "free," begin? That is an incredible story that begins in the early 1800s on the other side of the world.

### **Birth of the Nation**

In 1816, a group of men in the United States created an organization called the American Colonization Society to enable freed black slaves, as well as freeborn blacks, to move to Africa. Many of the former slaves had been taken from their homes during the terrible slave trade but did not have the money to return home after they were freed. The men of the American Colonization Society wanted to change that. It was founded by a Presbyterian minister named Robert Finley along with Francis Scott Key, the author of "The Star-Spangled Banner"; US Congressman Henry Clay; and Bushrod Washington, the nephew of George Washington.

## **Who Lives in Liberia?**

There are many different ethnic groups living in Liberia today. English is the official language, but the people can be divided into several language families including the Mande/Malinke, the Kru, and the Atlantic/Guinean. The Mande/Malinke people group includes the Kpelle, Mano, Dan, Loma, Vai, Gbandi, Mandingo, and Maninke. The Kru includes the Bassa, Kru, Grebo, and Krahn peoples. The Atlantic/Guinean people includes the Kissi, Gola, and Akan. In addition, there are the Americo-Liberians descended from the American blacks who settled the colony. There are also a small number of people who are descended from freed Caribbean slaves.

Despite the presence of the Christian church in Liberia's story since the beginning, today the majority of the people (between 42.5%-45.3%) belong to tribal religions. Many still see Christianity as a religion of "outsiders." Approximately 36.8%-41.43% of the people are Christian. Approximately 15% of the people are Muslim. There is a continuing movement of Liberian Christians to help the people of their nation see that Jesus died for every person everywhere, not just for the people of one land.

Let's take a closer look at just a few of the people groups in Liberia.

### **People Groups**

The Dan people live in northeastern Liberia and are mostly farmers. They grow rice, cassava, sweet potatoes, cocoa, coffee, and rubber. They use palm oil for fuel and cooking. Children help at home by chasing away the wild animals and birds that try to eat or destroy their

crops. Each village is ruled by a chief and a council of elders. The Bible has been translated into their language, but most follow a mystical tribal religion.

The Maninka people live throughout Liberia and are descendants of the people of the Mali Empire, a great empire that ruled parts of West Africa from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Family and community are very important to the Maninka. They often live in walled-in villages, with each family living in a separate house surrounded by a fence. The Maninka have combined some of the teachings of Islam with their tribal beliefs and believe heavily in magic.

The Mano people are farmers who raise rice, peppers, beans, maize, bananas, and other fruits and vegetables. They eat rice at every meal. Though they raise cows and chickens, they do not milk the cows. They eat a large number of fish and even a few bugs that they toast and eat as snacks! They are mostly animists, which means they believe in and fear spirits that live in things such as trees and rocks.

The Vai people live in northwestern Liberia and are mostly farmers, carpenters, weavers, and tailors. Vai children first attend bush school for four to five years, where they learn community and survival skills. Some go on to English schools where they can learn the English language. A large number of the Vai are Muslim and send their children to schools taught by imams where the children learn the Arabic language.

## **Animals of Liberia**

Liberia is home to many different kinds of animals, including monkeys, chimpanzees, antelopes, anteaters, elephants, leopards, crocodiles, snakes, scorpions, and many different types of lizards, birds, and fish. Liberia is also home to a very rare animal, the pygmy hippopotamus,

## The Counties of Liberia

Label the following counties on the map of Liberia: Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado, Nimba, River Cess, River Gee, Sinoe. Draw a star on the map to represent Monrovia, the capital city.

