A LONG WALK TO WATER, II

A novel by
LINDA SUE PARK

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

CLARION BOOKS
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
Boston | New York | 2010
Then a woman in the group reached out and touched
again, just as the others had.
Selma hung his head. They would leave him behind
help to us.
"He is too young to do any real work—will he be of no

and fool?"

"Another mouth to feed. It is already hard enough to

"He is a child. We will slow us down."

the front of the group began speaking to each other
Selma saw doubt on the people's faces. Several men at
one is alone. "Will you take him with you?"
The woman put her hand on Selma's shoulder. "This

was no reply.

a few of the people exchanged uneasy glances. There

"What are you going?" she asked.
The old woman came up behind him and Georgia the

Strangers. No one from his family

with it.

then the last left his lungs and seemed to take all hope
Selma held his breath as he scanned the faces one by one.

Southern Sudan. 1985
the arm of one of the men. She said nothing but looked first at the man and then at Salva.

The man nodded and turned to the group. “We will take him with us,” he said.

Salva looked up quickly. A few in the group were shaking their heads and grumbling.

The man shrugged. “He is Dinka,” he said, and began walking again.

The old woman gave Salva a bag of peanuts and a gourd for drinking water. He thanked her and said goodbye. Then he caught up with the group, determined not to lag behind, not to complain, not to be any trouble to anyone. He did not even ask where they were going, for fear that his questions would be unwelcome.

He knew only that they were Dinka and that they were trying to stay away from the war. He had to be content with that.

The days became a never-ending walk. Salva’s feet kept time with the thoughts in his head, the same words over and over: Where is my family? Where is my family?

Every day he woke and walked with the group, rested at midday, and walked again until dark. They slept on the ground. The terrain changed from scrub to woodland;

they walked among stands of stunted trees. There was little to eat: a few fruits here and there, always either unripe or worm-rotten. Salva’s peanuts were gone by the end of the third day.

After about a week, they were joined by more people—another group of Dinka and several members of a tribe called the Jur-chol. Men and women, boys and girls, old and young, walking, walking . . .

Walking to nowhere.

Salva had never been so hungry. He stumbled along, somehow moving one foot ahead of the other, not noticing the ground he walked on or the forest around him or the light in the sky. Nothing was real except his hunger, once a hollow in his stomach but now a deep buzzing pain in every part of him.

Usually he walked among the Dinka, but today, shuffling along in a daze, he found he had fallen a little behind. Walking next to him was a young man from the Jur-chol. Salva didn’t know much about him, except that his name was Buksa.

As they walked along, Buksa slowed down. Salva wondered sluggishly if they shouldn’t try to keep up a bit better.

Just then Buksa stopped walking. Salva stopped, too.
Here the buskers smile was even brighter now. You see there.

The kind the one I was listening to. He led me right

"But what shall I tell them?"

By now Salas had caught the feeling of excitement.

"Yes! he said. NOW go call the other!"

Busker stopped spinning in front of a very large tree.

"Walter!" Salas shouted to ask.

paused to listen, then kept going even faster.

very quickly, Salas struggled to keep up. Twice Busker

"Yes, there it is again. Come on, Busker began walking.

Salas followed and shook his head.

You hear?"

"Whaah! a slow smile spread over Busker's face. "There."

his hunger."

Salas had begun to grow until it was even stronger than

Was the genuine genuine close, instead of rather away?

He turned his ears. What was that for? Planet's Bompas?

trees...

there, a few rain voices, birds calling somewhere in the

could hear the noise of the rest of the group stared at

returning. They stood motionless for several moments. Salas

plunge ahead his head and turned his bow, his

standing still

but he was too weak and hungry to ask why they were
Salva had never seen anything like the desert. Around his village, Loun-Arik, enough grass and shrubs grew to feed the grazing cattle. There were even trees. But here in the desert, nothing green could survive except tiny evergreen acacia bushes, which somehow endured the long winter months with almost no water.

Uncle said it would take three days to cross the Akobo. Salva’s shoes stood no chance against the hot stony desert ground. The soles, made from rubber tire treads, had already been reduced to shreds held together with a little leather and a great deal of hope. After only a few minutes, Salva had to kick off the flapping shreds and continue barefoot.

The first day in the desert felt like the longest day Salva had ever lived through. The sun was relentless and eternal: There was neither wisp of cloud nor whiff of breeze for relief. Each minute of walking in that arid heat felt like an hour. Every breathing became an effort: Every breath Salva took seemed to drain strength rather than restore it.

Thorns gored his feet. His lips became cracked and parched. Uncle cautioned him to make the water in his gourd last as long as possible. It was the hardest thing Salva had ever done, taking only tiny sips when his body cried out for huge gulps of thirst-quenching, life-giving water.

The worst moment of the day happened near the end. Salva stubbed his bare toe on a rock, and his whole toenail came off.

The pain was terrible. Salva tried to bite his lip, but the awfulness of that never-ending day was too much for him. He lowered his head, and the tears began to flow.

Soon he was crying so hard that he could hardly get his breath. He could not think; he could barely see. He had to slow down, and for the first time on the long journey, he began to lag behind the group. Stumbling about blindly, he did not notice the group drawing farther and farther ahead of him.

As if by magic, Uncle was suddenly at his side.

“Salva Mawien Dut Ariik” he said, using Salva’s full name, loud and clear.

Salva lifted his head, the sobs interrupted by surprise.

“Do you see that group of bushes?” Uncle said, pointing. “You need only to walk as far as those bushes. Can you do that, Salva Mawien Dut Ariik?”
Saira looked at the hollow eyes and the cracked lips of one of the men on the sand, 
pointed a little way onto a clump and began to wet the lips with a drop of water. She shook her head, then in her eyes, she spoke. "The man did not answer. When she looked up, there was no one left in the desert."

"What are you doing, a man called. You cannot..."

and kneeled down. She opened her collar of water. One of the women in Saira's group pushed forward as Saira watched, her voice of the men, then made a sound, another tried to raise his head but fell back again, a droplet of water, it was people. They were completely motionless. One made a small, desperate motion with his hand.

Saira looked nearer. Saira could not be sure, all seemed to be motionless. The water of the sand blunted that large clump of rocks up ahead. It almost everything look motionless, or was it the one who was won, the face of the sand made in exactly the same place.

The desert. Saira felt as if she had walked for hours while sitting...

that the group was making any progress at all across the sands. The same dust. There was not a thing to indicate that was newly encountered. The same rocks. The same...and the heat and worse of all to shaders amidst a hush of purpose. The next day was a precise copy of the one before.

The desert.

blessings of darkness fell across the desert and it was time.

At last, the sun was distinctly forced from the sky. A forward, one painful step at a time. He was somewhat able to keep his wounded feet moving time. Saira would think of his family and his village, and each time he spoke to Saira, using his full name, each time continuing in this way. For the rest of the walk...

rocks...a snail bike of everything expected...

the rocks, Arrgh there, a loud scratch...another clump of...Whe they reached the bushes, Und they pointed out a

...be the better...Cheewing on the sour fruit that made Saira feel a bit. Und he reached into his bag. He took out a rambutan and handed it to Saira. Saira wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. He.
of the men lying on the hot sand, and his own mouth felt so dry that he nearly choked when he tried to swallow.

"If you give them your water, you will not have enough for yourself!" the same voice shouted. "It is useless—they will die, and you will die with them!"