

and looked from side to side in panic.

The teacher edged his way along the wall to the window. He took a quick peek outside. The gunfire had stopped, but now people were shouting and running.

"Go quickly, all of you," the teacher said, his voice low and urgent. "Into the bush. Do you hear me? Not home. Don't run home. They will be going into the villages. Stay away from the villages—run into the bush."

He went to the door and looked out again.

"Go! All of you, now!"

The war had started two years earlier. Salva did not understand much about it, but he knew that rebels from the southern part of Sudan, where he and his family lived, were fighting against the government, which was based in the north. Most of the people who lived in the north were Muslim, and the government wanted all of Sudan to become a Muslim country—a place where the beliefs of Islam were followed.

But the people in the south were of different religions and did not want to be forced to practice Islam. They began fighting for independence from the north. The fighting

The boys scrambled to their feet. Some of them were crying. The teacher began hurrying the students out the door.

Salva was near the end of the line. He felt his heart beating so hard that its pulse pounded in his throat and ears. He wanted to shout, "I need to go home! I must go home!" But the words were blocked by the wild thumping in his throat.

When he got to the door, he looked out. Everyone was running—men, children, women carrying babies. The air was full of dust that had been kicked up by all those running feet. Some of the men were shouting and waving guns.

Salva saw all this with one glance.

Then he was running, too. Running as hard as he could, into the bush.

Away from home.