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My Name is Juba

J. S. Hunter

My name is Juba. I'm fifteen years old. I live here in the camp. It's about 15 kilometers south-west of Gulu . Gulu is in Uganda. Near the border with Sudan. My mother called me Juba. She was trying to get there to get away from the fighting. She just got as far as here. She was Acholi. She said we had some of our people in Juba. They left Uganda during the fighting before. Sister Cecilia says she remembers that fighting. She was on the other side of the Mountains of the Moon. Too far to hear the gunfire but she said they would see the bodies in the river—sometimes for a few weeks after a big battle. They would get snared in the branches sometime then it would take some heavy rains to swell the river and wash out all the quiet places. She said she still remembers the smell. The cattle would be making noise. And then someone would go and see. It was terrible business to bury them she said. But we are the same people you see. And the river joins us. It goes down to Juba from here. Sometimes after the rains and it has gone down a bit, I walk out there. It's still fierce. You could imagine those currents taking you to the ends of the Earth. Sister Cecilia says it goes to Egypt. She showed me on the old map she's got rolled up in the cupboard. I saw Khartoum as well but she didn't say anything about that. When all the little ones are asleep Sister Cecilia says I can come with my exercise book. When I have filled up this one she says she's going to give me a Bible. But sometimes she's got a headache about the food and I have to leave her alone. She's a good person. I've been here since my mother died and she's been here before that. She said she remembered when my mother died. There was nothing anyone could do. There's a small hospital in Gulu but the road is so bad in the rains. Even if you have transport. For a woman in labor there was no time. Sister Cecilia explained the baby couldn't get out, something was in the way. My mother just bled and bled and the baby died too. It was a boy. There's not many boys here. They take them for soldiers even when they are quite small and train them. I'm glad I had a girl. I was so scared it wouldn't come out. Some of the children here are very sick. Because their mothers had the same sickness. The sisters teach me how to care for them. I think I am good at it. They are getting old now. No new ones come anymore. They said they are so old they

are not going anywhere now. And they have seen so much fighting they are not scared. When the little ones are big enough they show them how to cultivate. Sometimes we get some grain and oil and soap from the aid agencies but mostly we look after ourselves. Even when the lorry gets through you will find most of the things we really need, like medicine, have disappeared along the way. Probably at the first police post says Sister Cecilia. She says I must learn all I can. My mother called me Juba. She wanted to take me there. Now there's fighting there too. I wonder if I'll find any of our people left there. Maybe one day I will get my daughter to Juba.