

John's Story

A Loma Tale of Tradition
and
Change

John Koluba
(Sweet Africa)

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Preface

Harrison Owen

John Koluba joined our household in 1967 when I was Associate Director of Peace Corps in Monrovia, Liberia. John was a teenager and came to help us around the house. My wife, Ethelyn Rose, met John at a nearby Episcopal Church facility. John lived with us during the time that we were in Peace Corps, and when we departed, we made arrangements for him to attend high school. We kept in contact through letters and an occasional phone call.

The years passed and we lost contact with John, due in part to the turbulence that was building in Liberia. Years of oppression and corruption fueled an eruption with bloody consequences in the coup led by Sgt Samuel Doe, which was followed by revolution and counter revolution. John just disappeared. We did hear that John had taken refuge in the bush (jungle) – some word came that he might be in Ivory Coast.... And then silence.

Years later, 2005 I would guess, I received an email from a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ghana asking if I was the Harrison Owen who was Peace Corps staff in Monrovia in the late 60's. And if so, did I know a John Koluba? John was a refugee in Ghana.

There are no words to describe our feelings at the time. John had been through hell, lived to tell the tale, and had even written a book. Through the good offices of Peace Corps Volunteers, most recently Mary Segretti, the book arrived in four hand written copybooks. I had them transcribed and an edited version follows.

The writing is John's with occasional efforts on my part to bring it a little closer to American English – but only a little. Completing my efforts are those of Beth Holtam, who spent many years in Liberia, including some that overlapped my stay. Most importantly she was/is an English teacher with a deep knowledge and ear for “Liberian English.”

The book opens with a poem, “I Love War.” I can only describe it as an anguished cry of the soul. What comes next is the story of the Loma people engaging an external and changing world, all seen through the eyes of a young man. John says the young man is not himself, but strangely the heroine of the story is John’s grandmother.

The juxtaposition of the opening poem, *I Love War*, followed by the sometimes transcendently beautiful description of Loma life is harsh, maybe even shattering. But in my mind that juxtaposition creates the space in which you may experience both the horror and the wonder that John evokes. Doubtless there are a number of scholarly efforts describing tribal life and practice with greater accuracy and detail – but I sincerely doubt that any could match John’s story for the authentic feel that only, one who has lived there, can create.

A confession. I did edit out much of what John wrote of the history of Liberia and the Civil War itself. I did so for two reasons. First, it replicated material that is available elsewhere, but mostly because it simply does not come close to the quality and intensity of the heart of John’s tale. There was, however, one piece that I could not let go. It follows.

Harrison Owen

Forward

John Koluba

The Liberian Civil War began for me as I was sitting in front of Comfort in the classroom. Comfort is not her real name but is what I call her. She reached out and touched my hair. "What are you, country boy, doing here in our school?"

"In your school? What makes it your school?" My question took her by surprise. Comfort was now more determined to prove to me that St. John's Episcopal High School was for the children of the elite; and perhaps, a handful of country children: the indigenous – tribal children – whose parents had enough money to send them there. Perhaps some good and kind hearted missionary seeing the intelligence in the country child sent him or her there.

She became more brave. "I am Comfort William. My great, great, great" – she paused. "I mean all the way from the third-generation came from the United States – United States of America. We can trace our genealogy to the U.S.A. We are Americo Liberians." "Who are you and what is your name?"

"Koluba" is my name."

"Ko, what? Lord Jesus have mercy!" "Do you have a Christian name? "Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you been baptized?" Comfort's mother was the leader of the choir in the Methodist church, in Robertsport. Her father was the pastor and they were all Americo-Liberians. Almost all Americo Liberians have English names. They call them Christian names -- names, like John, Mary, Robert, Robertson Daniel, Thomas, Thompson, Josephine, Susan... Names that have no meanings or whose meanings they do not know. Needless to say they are very proud of these names. These, according to them, are civilized names. Any indigenous names are what Americo Liberians call country names. They were frowned upon. Any indigenous person who was going to be a Christian had to change his or her name – to one of those civilized names.

“How did you get here,” I asked? “Have you people always been here as we, the indigenous, have always been here? Our names have meanings and these meanings make us what and who we are. You do not know your full history.”

Upon hearing these words, there was anger in her face as she looked directly into my eyes.

John Koluba

The Beauty of War

I love war; I love to hear
The heart rendering cries of
Women as the soldiers enjoy their booties.

Forcefully tear off their dresses
Drop them on the ground
And while still pleading,
Rape them.

Taking away womanhood and true
Dignity from them. They are only
Objects of war; spoils to be
Enjoyed by the soldiers.

These brave brutes that would
Destroy their kind; set ablaze
Villages, cities and towns.
And have funful madness
Shooting those who run from the
Burning fire.

I love war;
I love to hear the saddened voices
Of children standing there in the
Pouring rain, calling upon their parents

Lying there in pools of blood
Mommy, Daddy what's wrong?
Get up, get up, oh please get up!!!
I love war

I love war. I love to see
A burnt-down city whose
Citizens are only remnants of
Charred bones.

The country in disarray; a remembrance of past glory

I love war.

The greed in man, the lust in
Humanity and the burning
Hatred, one race against another

One tribe against another

Lord, behold the human woes!

I love war.

I love war.

A country divided against herself

One class rules and the

Others like donkeys must

Always obey their riders.

I love war.

I love the day the donkeys

Refused their masters' pleasures

War sat in.

And oh what a slaughter

Was it really necessary?

All the killings, all the destruction?

For the life of a child, one mother,
One father, is more than all
The riches the world over.
So I say, I love war.

The happy laughter of children
The shapely beauty of women
Mingled with their soft, sweet
And tender voices.
The embrace of happy people
These I will forever miss.
War has cruelly taken them from me.
So, I say, I love war.

Chapter 1

War and Refugees 1990

The rains dropped down forcefully from the sky as if the gods of the heavens were pouring buckets of water on the earth, millions or perhaps billions of them. It was so in the season the rains came most, the rainy season.

The year was 1990. The people, once proud of their native land as happy go-getters, were now sad and confused and full of despair.

There were mothers, fathers, children of all ages and above all, the aged, dazed and looking into the sky or into far-away distances with no more feeling left. Their souls and spirits have left their bodies; these daydreaming bodies stood glued to the earth, the sandy earth soaked with rain. They were dreaming about the land, the places, the towns, and cities the villages they have left.

Was it all real? Are they now in a strange land? As the days rolled on, the dream became true and heart-breakingly real.

The sounds of gunfire sang their mournful songs and bodies dropped down to poor, sad Mother Earth. She was now colored with red, the precious red: the most valuable liquid – the juice of life. Human blood of all types from all ages soiled the earth.

The music of the guns sang louder and louder as grenades and bombs joined in the singing now and then, with thunder-clap voices and fires vigorously coming from their throats.

Their songs tore open the belly of Mother Earth as they sundered her, and her inner parts sometimes rose hundreds of feet above the massive earth. Smoke, mixed with dust, covered the living and made breathing most difficult.

As the shooting subsided and the mournful songs ceased a little, shapeless human bodies lay everywhere. Some were still bleeding while others had clots of the red liquid in the many mouths the bullets have given them.

Bodies legless, bodies headless, and bodies armless all lay in any shape one can imagine. They all carried the same message. It was a message loud and clear to any onlooker. "We are all dead," their silent voices spoke in unison.

"Yesterday we walked, yesterday we talked, yesterday we played, yesterday we sang, yesterday we ate, and yesterday we were happy and had sweet dreams. Today we lie motionless, thoughtless and perform no action the living perform. Our spirits have been forced out of our bodies to seek fonder worlds, but where? I wish I knew."

The warring lords boasted of how many they have killed. While the dead bodies of their country people spread throughout the land, these war lords took pride in stating how many of their brothers, sisters and children they have killed, brutally murdered.

Yes. Murdered their own kind. Ask me: what was the reason for the killing? What benefits have they reaped from the senseless, brutal mass slaughter of their own people? I can only sincerely say I do not know. For no reason can be given to justify the Liberian Civil War.

I am not interested in the war, which destroyed my people. I have no pleasure in repeating the story the world already knows. My desire is to introduce to you a unique personality. A survivor.

War has no feelings. War has no thoughts of its own. War has no conscience. War has only one aim. Destroy. Destroy.

This was the music played by the war lords and the songs their weapons sang while my people dropped dead, maimed or wounded. This was the music they danced to while Liberia died and I died too. Yes, I died with her.

Is it wise for parents to kill their children? Is it wisdom to murder one's best friends for mistakes made? What wisdom or justice is there in destroying the breadwinner? What decency is there in raping women? Hopeless women, confused, despairing women?

What kind of mind would bring about the thoughts in a man to do such acts? The sick and degenerate minds were created by war and greed and power. These are the minds that create such actions, and place them in the human flesh to be performed most brutally.

Since war only destroys lives and properties and societies of all kind, is it a wise action? What justice is there in killing children? What is the cause for killing innocent women? What is right about killing one's kindred? Will nature pardon the brute that tears down humanity with joy? Should not the tree, which produces no good fruits be cut down? Are they not wicked who produce weapons for the sole purpose of killing human beings?

Will bloodshed ever bring peace to suffering humanity? Will true peace and happiness come to this world through military might and rule? How can the weapons of war ever bring lasting peace? Why should soldiers go on peace missions with weapons?

These are just a few of the questions in the mind of the man I shall introduce. He indeed is one of the millions of victims of the civil war – the senseless, cruel, and brutal savagery that rocked the once beautiful and sweet country called Liberia – Land of Liberty. Whose liberty was it? For whom was this land liberated?

He stood there drenched in the chilly July rain with many other people of all ages who were now called “refugees.”

The children were just as bemused as their parents. They all moved about in confusion and disbelief, like a herd of sheep without a shepherd. This crowd was like a large group of animals that had been hunted from every direction.

Now the living grouped together, perhaps they thought themselves relieved to be alive, standing there on the vast expanse of sandy soils that would soon be their home. How long, how many years, centuries? Only time would tell. For time is the bearer of good news and bad news. As always in the hands of Time lay all things, all changes and conditions.

It is Time that brings about the seasons, even months and years. Today, we are happy. Tomorrow will we be glad? Will we be sad?

Tonight we sleep in deep and dreamy slumber. Today we marry and and tomorrow children are born unto us. Will these things always be the same? Only time will tell.

Chapter 2

The Survivor Remembers

I will not call him a refugee for he hates this word. For him a refugee is like refuse, dirt garbage to be disposed of. The refuse and the garbage has no more use. So we bury them or burn them.

The village of Letesu is on the top of a hill, a little mountain, I suppose. There are many footpaths that lead to this Loma village. The people are mostly rice farmers, and travel these paths daily to and from their rice farms. But there is the main path leading from the village to other villages and towns. At the very foot of this mountain lies a very large and forceful creek, flowing with its clear clean water. This is our source of drinking water. We do not wash clothes in this water, nor do we bathe in it. With our earthen pots and large calabashes, we draw and keep water for our daily use. Big tall trees stand along both sides of her banks. The trees are very tall, some are a hundred feet, others even taller.

Hundreds of miles along Zeayea the forest stands tall with monkeys leaping from treetop to treetop while colorful birds fly over the trees and the shaded banks.

In mid December and early January, of each year, each farmer chooses the forest for his farming. The clearing of the land begins, first by using a cutlass to cut down the underbrush. After a month of this, an acre or two is cleared. After the clearing or “brushing the bush,” the felling of the trees begins.

In my boyhood days I watched my Grandfather in his blacksmith shop, making hoes, cutlasses, axes, knives, heads of spears and arrows. Of course, there were many other tools he made as demanded by the villagers who used them and knew what they wanted.

Oh how I love to see, from the beginning, the pounding of the red-hot iron into a cutlass or a knife and even hoes and shovels! There were wonderful moments for me and

many of my peers, who grouped near the blacksmith's shop to watch my Grandfather creating tools from the pieces of iron the farmers have given him.

It made me proud to see the action of my Grandfather while his body was bathed in sweat. He was highly respected. I am happy to have been one of his grandchildren, even to this day.

Chapter 3

Koto The Educator

We stood around the big boy, Koto. All the boys and some of the girls liked him. Although he was born in our village, like all of us, Koto lived in Monrovia, Liberia's capital. He spoke English to us and would explain what he had said in Loma, our language. He told us stories about Monrovia.

"There are white people in Monrovia," he would say. We children stood around him excited to hear more.

"White people," we shouted in unison. "Do you mean? Like cotton?"

He laughed and shook his head from side to side. "No, no stupid," he would say, starring into our faces. "No, no one is white like white cotton."

"But you said that they are white," we insisted, hoping for more and better answers.

"Their skins are not like ours." He then looked up into the sky as if he was seeking some answers from the gods. Then he turned his gaze on each of us. Koto touched the coop and asked us, "Do you know what this is?"

Some of us answered, "Chicken coop."

Laughingly, he said, "Yes, yes, that is where the chickens sleep." The white peoples' skin is like a slaughtered chicken dipped into hot water for a few minutes and feathers pulled out when taken from the heated water leaving the chicken skin bare.

"Some white people's skins look like brownish white, you know, he said pleadingly, as if that was the best description he could give us.

"Have pity on the poor fellow," Koto said. "One of those white men came to this very village a week ago," he continued. "He spoke to the chief about building God's house in this village."

"That man, I saw him too," said Yasa.

"What did the chief say," Koto asked.

“You know Nana Kolie?” another girl Mawa shouted. “He told Mr. Brown that our gods only need sacrifices and loyalty, not house. They sleep not and eat not. The sacrifices are to appease them to do our biddings.”

“House for gods?” we all said and laughing till our bellies hurt.

“There are many houses for the white man’s god in Monrovia, but one never sees the god” Koto continued. “On Sundays many people go to the house of the white man’s god dressed in their fine clothes. They sit on long benches, their faces in one direction. There is usually one person about thirty feet in front of the crowd. He or she leads them in singing and clapping hands.”

“Perhaps he or she is the god,” Yasa said. “The white man is only human; the gods are spirits, and do not dwell in the robe called human flesh. Our fathers and mothers worship spirit gods and the gods do give them their biddings. Some of the spirit gods live in the air. Others live in the high mountains and yet there are others who were humans before, just like us. They ate, they slept, and they had children and did all those things that humans do. They even had two or three calabashes of palm wine each day especially during the farming season.

These are the ancestor gods. They became gods, ancestor gods when they became pure spirits through death, death of the robes called flesh. They, like lizards shed their skins but are invisible to the human eyes. Only the Zoes can see them. There are powerful Zoes among our tribes. Some of them even have conversations with the ancestors on certain occasions. Some Zoes call rain from the sky and the parched earth, is bathed. Oh how happy the animals and the plants become!

Chapter 4

Zoes

Once, in the middle of the rainy season, the chiefs of the Zeamah clan had a meeting for a week in Letesu to select a clan chief from among themselves. About mid-day, on the last day of the meeting, it began to rain very heavily and the chiefs hopelessly decided to suspend the meeting. It was at that moment that Sumo, one of the Zoes stood up.

“My brothers and fellow chiefs, our ancestors say when it is raining, we seek shelters and remain dry. I am your shelter.”

Upon saying this, he pointed the index finger of his left hand to the sky and commanded the rain to stop. It stopped immediately.

The women and children sang praises to his name all throughout Loma Land for many, many years. Great was the power of the Zoes. So great, that we children ran from them whenever we saw them.

I once heard two elders conversing about Kpalagala, the Zoe from Zeyeda.

“He used to walk on the Lawo River like we humans walk on land,” one elder said to the other. “I was present on the day of the feast of the first harvest of the rice season. He walked on the bank of the Lofa River and entered the river still walking on the river as we humans walk on land. In the middle of the river he stood and clapped his hands. Turning to the crowd along the riverbank, he descended like a stone into the river. An hour later he came up on top of the water and behind him were floating large calabashes full of hot cooked rice like the ones we eat in our houses. He then commanded the men to bring the calabashes, which were now at the river’s bank to the people standing along the edge of the river. We all ate and were filled. I was there. I saw it all and I, Kokulo, ate some of that food. It was very good.”

Such spirits, though we call them men, have clothed themselves in the robes of human flesh and have returned to the human world to serve and teach humanity. Most spirits who have walked the earth in human flesh are misunderstood.” Kpalagala, like most Zoes had only one wife and unlike most Zoes, he was born with braided hair and no razor ever touched his hair.

Chapter 5

Koto's Shoes

Koto came to our village every six months; although it was also his village, we called him Citizen of Monrovia.

“There are bright lights on all the streets in Monrovia. They hang high about fifty to a hundred feet above and shine very brightly above the ground in Monrovia. These lights are so bright that one cannot see the stars at night. Monrovia is not like this small village, where small children run around under the moonlight playing games. You bare-footed children, I know that most of you have jiggers in your toes.”

These words he told us while we stood around him under the pawpaw trees, hunger for his shoes filled our desires. We all wanted shoes like his. We wanted to protect our feet from the jiggers and the dust. We children wanted to hear more stories from Koto about Monrovia, Koto's city.

“I visit the house of the white man's God some Sundays. I love to hear the singing and the sounds of the musical instruments. Many of the people go there. I am talking about black people, not just Loma people. There are all kinds of races and people in Monrovia. White people, Lebanese, Chinese, Indians and black people from other parts of Africa. Most of them are educated. They can read and write and sing from the little books the size of the two palms if glued together. Some of these little books are black, others are blue, and others are red or green but the color does not matter. They all sing from these books to their god no one ever sees.

They even say in the house of the white man's god, that this god has a son. I mean the white man's god has a son, a real human son but the white man's god is a spirit! We all know that spirits have no bodies, but the white man's god is a spirit and yet had a human son and a real human mother. This is one of the many things they teach the people who go to the house of the white man's god.”

“Our gods have names,” said Komasa. “The white man’s god, do they have names?” she asked.

By this time there were about thirty-five of us gathered around Koto our hero, our Monrovia man. He looked around and he knew we were serious. We wanted to learn more about Monrovia, about the lights that hung high, very high beyond human reach and shone like the sun. We wanted to learn more about the white man’s gods. Do these gods accept the blood of chickens or goats, sheep or even cows as sacrifices? What moves these gods to do the biddings of their human servants?

Koto was getting tired. Finally he said, “I know you want to know more about all the things I have told you. Come tomorrow.” We agreed and parted our different ways to our houses.

Chapter 6

Koto's Story

The food was very tasty, but we children ate in a hurry because we wanted to go and hear more from our Monrovia man. I was particularly interested in hearing more about the white man's gods and the human mother. What was her name and whose daughter was she? Why did her parents give her to the god of the white man as a wife? Was this god like our ancestor spirits who become ancestors when they cross over? When so-called death takes away their flesh and the ancestors cross over from the world of flesh into the world of pure spirits, here in this world they are not "dead."

This is the teaching of the Loma people. Perhaps, the white man's god is one of the elementary spirits. These are the spirits who have never had a body of any kind, but can and will take upon themselves any form to execute the commands of Gaywologala, the highest in power and creator of all the other lesser gods. The Lord of all spirits in the One. Perhaps the white man's god is Gaywologala, the god of all the worlds and of the other gods?

These thoughts fed me more food than the beans tobogi we were eating. I washed my hands after we finished. Some of my friends knew what I was thinking. Four of them washed their hands and we left the other children with the elders. "They are like the snails." Flumo said, "They eat too slow. They, like the elders, want to suck the juicy marrows of every bone and nibble on the fiber of every meat in the sauce before they leave," he concluded. "One who seeks knowledge must befriend the elders," Gamai said. She has been listening and following. She too, wanted to hear more from Koto.

Chapter 7

Market Day

The day was Friday our market day. It was also the market day of the other surrounding villages: Barziwen, Balakpalazu and Luyema. People will all bring their cola nuts, rice, dried and smoked meats and fish to sell in the market in Barziwen. There will also be many calabashes of honey and palm wine for sale. We children were excited and ready to eat some country bread and run around in the market place with our friends, and meeting new friends.

Fridays were the best days for us children. We did not go to the farm on Fridays and there were different kinds of food to be bought for only a cowry or two, for this was our money before the coming of the white people into Loma country.

In the days of which I speak each tribe referred to the land it occupied as “country” owned by that tribe: thus, Loma country, Kpelle country, Kizi country. For as many tribes as there are in Liberia, so were there countries. This was before the coming of the white people into the hinterland.

Our Monrovia man, our hero has told us many interesting stories about the beautiful city that was three hundred and fifty miles from our village. The most interesting of all was about the white people’s school in Monrovia especially the one he attended in B.T.C. B.T.C. was that Barclay Training Center ,a military institution.

Our hero knelt down on the ground before us and with his left index finger began to make strange signs on the ground. They looked very odd to us children as we gathered around him. He then began to utter words as he wrote these signs, “ABC...DEFGH.

“What are you saying?” we asked him.

Koto stood up and began to point to the signs one at a time. “They are all ABCs or alphabet,” he told us, wearing a broad smile on his face. “These are the roots to the white man’s language. If you want to speak the white man’s language, write the white man’s language, read and understand the white man’s language, there are the roots. We

all know that a tree without roots soon dies.” With these roots you will know the white man’s songs, the kind he sings to his god and to his god’s son on Sundays. With the full knowledge of these strange signs as you call them, you can read the white man’s books, and even speak to him in his own language, as we speak Loma to each other.

“On Sundays in Monrovia, we sometimes go to the god house. The white man’s god’s house is called the church.” He then wrote the word on the ground. We all stood very attentive with even more curiosity.

Then Tanu broke the silence. “Shrine! Shrine! Shrine!” he shouted. The church is the shrine of the white man’s god. In it he offers sacrifices to his gods and the god’s son.

Oh now we children understood; we too, have shrines. Each household in the village owns a shrine. In the shrines we offer chickens, goats, sheep, even cows, to our gods. These are called blood sacrifices. They appease the gods very much.

Koto began to laugh again and shook his head from side to side as he did whenever something we did or said was funny to him. We looked upon him with pity. For the harder he tried to stop laughing, the more he laughed. There were tears in his eyes. He finally stopped laughing. Koto put his left hand into his pocket and pulled out a clean piece of cloth and wiped his tears. He then folded the piece of clean cloth and placed it into his pocket. He wore blue long trousers, and a pair of black shoes. We bare-footed children, looked upon him with deep envy and wished to be like him. We wanted to learn the white man’s funny signs, learn to say them, learn to write them, and one day go to the white man’s shrine in the city. We wanted to dress like our hero.

Koto stared into our faces with deep concern as a caring mother does for her children as she wonders which herb would cure the child’s cold and cough. He placed his right index finger to his lips and looked directly into the eyes of each of us. We were very quiet at this time, and began to hope he would speak ore wisdom to us in the white man’s language. He opened his mouth and spoke.

“Our shrines can be likened to the house of the white man’s god. For in it, he worships his god and the son of his god. In it he sings to his god and sometimes calls the

name of his god's son in his singing but he does not offer blood sacrifice to his god or to the son of his god, in the god house.”

“The white man says many strange things about his god and the god son. The god sent his son to die for the whole world. He, the god's son, is the sacrifice for all the human beings. This is some of the nonsense we listen to every Sunday in the god's house of the white man.”

“On some Sundays, the people in the white man's shrine or the god house are given small flat pieces of bread and small tot classes of red wine. Each person is to eat the bread and drink the wine. The bread represents the flesh of the god's son and the wine, his blood.” Upon hearing this we all laughed.

Then Tanu began to ask his questions. “So, they eat the flesh and drink the blood of humans like witches do? But if he died years ago how do they eat him today and drink his blood? Why would anyone want to do such things? So this god's son is like the chickens we slaughter to our gods in our shrines as sacrifices? The god's son becomes the human chicken.” “Ae hae!! Awool!!! God, no wife, no girl friend but he has a son and you sit in the white man's shrine listening to such nonsense?”

We all laughed and laughed. “What is the name of the god son?” “What is his mother's name?”

Koto said, “It is a long, long story, written in the god book of the white people. White people have no secrets. They write everything down in a book or in books. When you learn to read their books, you will know their secrets.

The god's son of the white man is called “Jesus Christ” and his mother is called, Mary. These are just a few pieces of the information in the book of his god.”

Chapter 8

Uncle Flumo

My uncle worked in Zorzor, a large town fifty miles from our village. He did not have a shrine in his house, for I went to visit him in Zorzor. There was not much talk about the white man's god in his house nor did he worship the god and the god's son of the white people.

My uncle was about five feet tall and very much resembled his sister, my mother. Mr. Flumo Zeaman was a very quiet man. The big toes on each foot were missing. And he visited a clinic. The clinic was built two miles away from Zorzor, and there were many people living in the vicinity of the clinic.

It was July and the gods of rain had opened the many calabashes in the heavens, pouring down their contents on happy Mother Earth. Vegetation grew large and shone with vigor, while large, tall trees looked to the heavens with out stretched hands in praise to the gods of the sky. Rivers and creeks overflowed. It was the season of rain. My mother had come from the farm. She always came home before my father for she had to prepare the evening meal.

My brother, Koboiku and I were sitting in the open kitchen warming ourselves by the fire. We both ran to meet her and welcome her. "Thank you both for building the fire, I will go right on with my cooking," Mother said. Suddenly she ran out into the pouring rain to meet a man who was coming towards her. She hugged him and took his brief case as they walked quickly into the kitchen. "This is your Uncle Flumo," she said to us.

We all sat by the fire, forming a circle around the burning embers. After a few minutes he took off his shoes and we saw that his big toes on both feet were missing. A surge of pity overtook me and I felt like expressing it in tears. Loma men do not cry out

loud. They cry within themselves for this is manly. So we both starred at his feet momentarily, making sure his gaze did not catch our eyes.

What evil has he done that his big toes had paid the price? What kind of sickness eats off only the toes of humans? Why have not our gods prevented this evil? Perhaps he earned it. For our elders say: that which befalls a man is the result of his doings.

Was Uncle Flumo a wicked man? Was he born on the day when the gods were angry? Did his mother and father argue a lot, displeasing the spirits?

These were only a few of my thoughts as I sat by the fire with the other three. The warmth of the fire was very welcoming and pleasurable, as the rain forcefully beat upon the grass roof.

“Which of these boys is the older?” our uncle asked our mother.

“Quiwu is the oldest,” she said, pointing to me.

“He is old enough now to go to school and learn the white man’s teachings. He has to go to school and learn those strange signs in the white man’s books. Get ready to go with me,” my uncle concluded.

“These are the only boys I have. We have heard from the chief that some white people are coming to our village soon to build a school, a clinic and the house of their god.”

“The clinic is good. The white man’s medicines are very powerful and indeed useful. My remaining toes are the results of the white man’s medicines. You remember when the Zoes told me to go to Zorzor and use the white man’s medicine. They work. The medicine for Leppers works. I have four beautiful toes on each foot,” our uncle said, with a smile, pointing to his toes. The white man is wise and uses his wisdom for his own benefits, and glory. He is like Kolu, one of the sages of our people. Returning from her farm one afternoon she found her house occupied by driver ants (black ants). Kolu did not panic. She was rather amused by the multitude and presence. She got a small calabash full of honey and slowly poured the honey making a trail from where the ants were to the mango tree four yards away from her house. She left for her farm again. Upon returning, Kolu found the absence of the ants, as she has expected. Kolu, now had her house all to herself, for the ants have left, following the sweet trail of honey.

I respect the white man for his wisdom, because our elders say, ‘A man without wisdom is likened to a dog. He is best dead.’ To gain wisdom we are initiated after attending the special school in the bush under the guidance of the Zoes and other wise people. Wisdom is the root of progress, success and happiness so say our elders.

Our women do not marry uninitiated men nor are they given to such men by their parents. There are men who do not know the words to say when giving a dowry to the woman he intends to marry. He is like a blind man living in the darkest cave. Knowledge and wisdom are brothers who always walk together, hand in hand. He who befriends those two is a happy one, so say our elders.

Initiation, this is the answer. To know is to have knowledge. To have wisdom is to have understanding, the use of wise judgment. These are twins who cannot do one without the other. This is a union that can never be broken. They are an infusion of each other. They are the highest attributes of “Gawologala” (Heavenly Father). They are not created but always have been as part of the being, the invisible being, Gala (God).

My uncle changed his clothes after his hot bath and was ready for his evening meal. First he ate rice and groundnut bread, a mixture of pounded rice and groundnuts, mixed with honey and a warm glass of goat milk. An hour later, he was served the rice and the bean soup full of shrimps boiled with smoked red snapper chunks and smoked goat meat. We had too.

Uncle Flumo was not a big eater and he gave the rest of his evening meal to us. We were happy and kept it for our breakfast.

“You have taken your Uncles food from him,” our mother said with a frown. “No, no,” said Uncle, “I have given it to them for I am too full.”

Chapter 9

The White Man's School

“The white man's school is not only for the teaching of his books, but also his religion and culture. Our grandchildren should not be learning his ways, or his books. For in the school of the white man he teaches our grandchildren about his god and the god's son who has a human mother.” My grandmother has joined the discussion.

“The white man will not be teaching them truth and glory about Loma land and people. If we allow him to build his shrine, we shall have allowed him to own the minds and hearts of our children and generations after them. He will change their thinking and will bring discord between them and us.

Those were the words of my grandmother who has been listening to Mother and Uncle Flumo's conversation. She was a big influential woman. Grandmother Luwopu knew her family tree and had many times told us from where she came. The six-foot tall Luwopu said, “I am a Bambara, my great ancestors are from the Mali Kingdom. They had to flee for their lives. Your white men were catching them and making slaves out of them. Our ancestors, you, African people and me. We fought them bravely!” She said these words forcefully, as her chest heaved in and out with anger. If the white man was once a slave catcher and master, then why should he be a good, kind doer now? Why, why, why?” “My grand children are not going to Zorzor and if the white man builds his shrine here or a school or clinic I will burn them down with him in it” She stared into Uncle Flumo's eyes as she forcefully spoke.

“You are my son, and a grown man now and still you do not know the ways of those white people. But, I do not blame you, for you were not born during the times. I was myself, a little girl about six when we were fleeing from them.

“These children will remain here and learn our ways. They will learn Loma culture. They are the offspring of Loma people, Bambara people. You, Flumo, also have Bambara blood in your veins. Our culture is rich and our teachings are great. Teach your sister’s children.”

After she had spoken, Grandmother began to dance and sing the war songs of the Loma warriors.

“Your words are true, my mother, and I will listen and obey so that the gods will bless me. You have seen the sun and moon many, many years before I was born. Through your wisdom and knowledge I was born and through your strength, you brought me forth.” As Uncle Flumo said these words he was kneeling before Grandmother, for this is the way adult sons and daughters show respect to their parents and elders.

Mama Luwopu touched the kneeling man’s head with the palm of her right hand; then uncle took his seat by his sister.

Dusk began to fall and darkness was slowly creeping in. The chickens moved closer to their coops as the night birds flew overhead looking for prey, their evening meals.

Uncle had been with us for a week and was ready to return. The morning came and as custom demands he went to greet Grandmother. He waited patiently by her door, standing. When the tall Luwopu opened the door of her hut Uncle knelt down before her.

“Oh, my mother, through whom I have seen the first light of the sun and moon and have tasted the sweetness of your breast milk and felt its strength in my bones and veins; you have given me physical strength, mental and spiritual growth; to you I bow in greetings. May you continue to live a vigorous life, guide us with wisdom and love ‘til that day when your ancestors call you to cross over and join them in the world of the spirits. May you have more years, my mother. May your eyes behold the sun for many, many harvest seasons.”

After speaking these words he held his peace but kept kneeling down before our grand ma. She touched his head with the index finger of her right hand and said, “Oh, my son, son of my womb and pride of my years, rise and shine like the sun in the dry season.” He who the Zoes have initiated in wisdom is the pride of his parents. For the

words of such children are filled with wisdom and spirit. Rise and may your initiation continue to show you light as you walk through this dark world of humanity. Rise my son, rise the first male of my womb, rise.” When she had spoken these words, she touched the crown of his head with the palm of her left hand and he stood up facing her as she stood in the doorway.

Chapter 10

Uncle Flumo Leaves

Uncle went back to the kitchen, for that is our meeting place, in the open kitchen, around the fire where stories are told, where wisdom is given and where children enjoy listening to stories full of wisdom from the elders. This is where uncle sat on one of the three-legged stools.

Grandmother came into the kitchen; dressed in her finery, beautifully woven country cloth, made into a long purple robe, bracelets of seven cowries on each wrist and a purple crown dotted with fourteen cowries. And she sat on a higher stool on the right side of my uncle, thus beginning the circle around the fireplace in the open kitchen.

Mother came and was well dressed. Our father sat at her right side; my brother and I joined the group completing the circle, around the fire.

“We are all here,” Grandmother said. “May it be well with us, may our gods bless us, may our elders who have gone before us be ever present with us.”

Your brother leaves today. He goes back to Zorzor, but today is our market day. He wants to leave today. Reality rules over wants. Many times, what we want is not real, therefore is not what we need. ‘Wants’ only signify pressure. The fulfillments of the body and flesh are only wants, not needs. Needs are given from within; they are of the spirit. We as humans cannot live without needs for a long time. Needs are natural and are of the spirit within. Needs support, nourish and sustain our physical body. Water is a need. The air we breathe is a need. The food we eat is a need. These are ‘musts.’

“Words are very important. In them we read the mind of the speaker. We feel his or her spirit. Words bear the power of life and death. Therefore speak but know what you say before you speak. Uncle Flumo in his own words wants to go to Zorzor. Does he need to go? Is there any need for him in Zorzor to fulfill?”

“He has not told us of a wife or children that are his in Zorzor. So why is his heart and mind glued to Zorzor? Is it because the white man and his shrine are calling him? Is it because of the white man’s medicine that cured his leprosy? What is it that has driven this Loma man to the foreigner? Why is this intruder at the core of his thoughts?”

Uncle Flumo was listening to grandmother’s speech. When she had stopped speaking, Uncle Flumo said, “Mother, I would rather death and the curse of our gods to befall me than disobey you or our ancestors. But things are changing in Loma country. In Zorzor, we use silver coins neatly shaped to buy our needs and wants. The white man’s photo is on the coins and the neatly shaped green papers. He tells us that the coins and green papers came from across the big blue waters.

“The coins and the green papers are quickly replacing our cowries. Soon, I’m afraid, our cowries will lose their value. They will be used only for rituals and decorations. Furthermore, the white man tells us that there is no Loma country, or Kpelle country or Gola country. There is only one country called Liberia and we Loma and all the other tribes are citizens of the Liberia country. The Liberia country has been divided into nine parts called counties. Loma Land is now called Lofa County, and we are not the only tribe living there. There are the Kizi, Gbandi, Gola, Bellah, and other tribes in our new world called Lofa County. We have become likened to a slaughtered cow, which the butcher cuts into pieces among strangers who eat the meat happily and do not give thanks to the owner of the cow and the butcher.”

Our county is ruled by a black man called the DC (District Commissioner). He is likened to a chief who rules not only Loma land but also all the lands in the country, thus Lofa County. DC is not his real name but only the power invested in him, by those who will soon send him to rule over us. Like I said, mother, times have changed and are changing still. We must change with the changing times or we become like the trees that refuse to bend when a strong wind is blowing. These trees will break. They will surely be broken, for they refused to bend as commanded by the strong wind. Mother, we are living in a stormy wind. We must obey the storm. If we refuse, we will be blown away by the storm. Storms created by the white man and his god cannot be destroyed by us, or

by our gods. It is only wise that we bow to his way before we are forced to do so, by our very offspring.

Grandmother was dazed with suppressed anger as Uncle Flumo spoke. She stood up from the three-legged chair on which she sat. She walked towards Uncle Flumo. He knelt down before her and she touched the crown of his head with the palm of her right hand. “Your mind is made up and with strong convictions, you believe your words are right. I will not stop your going to Zorzor. Remember my son, wants are not needs. Needs will always prevail over wants, for needs are always stronger. She spoke these words with great force, as she pressed harder on uncle’s head. He was grateful when she gave him her blessings and lifted her hands from his head. A great weight has been lifted, he thought to himself. Her eyes were red and filled with tears. A few drops have already fallen on her dress. She was starring down at her son, for she was much taller than he.

He looked up at his mother, the daughter of brave warriors. “Mother, why are you crying? Your words are like a burning arrow, which have gone through my heart. I am in deep thought. I will go to my own shrine and consult the gods who see what I cannot see and who know all things beyond human wisdom. I will ask for deeper meaning of your words and it shall be revealed to me the true meaning of your sayings. I will rest today and go tomorrow for the day is far gone. The ancestors say only wicked ones travel under the cover of darkness.”

“You are not wicked, my son, you are confused and deeply moved by the white man and his god. Perhaps a little rest will calm you down. My son, the first fruit of my womb; you are my child, my baby. I treated you with motherly love and care. Soon, you will be a baby of the foreigner. He will only use you and turn you to the worshipping of his god.”

Uncle Flumo’s voice began to tremble and so did his lips. He was confused and on the verge of tears, for his thoughts and words have made Grandmother sad.

They were both sad but grandmother Luwopu was not confused. She has never been. She sat quietly before the gods in her shrine.

Chapter 11

Before the Shrine

“What is the meaning, the inner meaning of his words? My child, yesterday has become a man today, full of confusion and slowly drifting away from his culture, from himself. Our land has been butchered into segments; are our gods confused? Have their powers waned before the intruder and his god’s son?”

“You have always protected guided and ruled over us with great wisdom and gentle love. Have we fallen into foreign hands for the worst? Who is this stranger and where is his strength?”

“What force guided him here into Loma land? Oh, my gods are now like the chaff of rice that the winds have blown to the birds. To you, the god of our ancestors, full of wisdom, the worlds are revealed. Nothing is hidden from you. You see all things for you are the all. You are the eye, the all seeing. You are the ones who give us knowledge and wisdom, the ones who show us the nature of all things, great and small. You who spring from Gawologala, and from whom you have been given power to help us when we appease you. Come now to my aid and show me what has befallen Loma Land.

She spreads her cowries on the prayer mat before her and arranges them for profound divination into the words spoken by Uncle Flumo.

There were many gods and goddesses in Grandmother’s shrine, represented by many shapes and sizes of calabash. They were arranged according to their natures and powers.

There was the god of thunder who strikes and kills our enemies when invoked. There was the god of fire, who gives power for warriors’ bravery and swiftness in times of war. There was the god of rain who brought water from the skies in times of drought. There was the goddess of fertility who made barren women bring forth children, thus bringing them joy. There was the goddess of invisibility, who protected hunters when

hunting dangerous animals, such as lions and leopards, which many times charge the hunters when wounded.

She sat quietly in her priestly garments, in her shrine in the inner room in the middle of the night. It was so quiet that the droppings of leaves from a tree fifty feet tall, five miles away could be heard. Grandmother could hear the beating of her heart and breathing as her chest and stomach heaved in and out slowly. She was now in the presence of the gods.

As she sat there silently on the prayer mat before the gods, she slipped into a trance, then into deeper thoughts, and finally into meditation. She was now one with the gods.

“O great ones, in your presence I now belong until you give me permission to return to Mother Earth. The words and deeds of my son have worried me all night. What do the words mean? Who is this intruder? What is his mission in Loma Land? What good or evil shall come out of it for our children and their offspring?”

The Gods spoke: “You Luwopu shall remain solid in body and spirit, a true and faithful servant to us and to your people. Yes, times have changed, and the intruder did not cause the change. He is the whip used in bringing the change.”

“The servants of kings and chiefs are commanded by them to bring human chickens; thus they go out in the forests, on the paths that lead to farms, travelled frequently. Children are lost, men on the way to their farms are lost. The chiefs and kings receive blood, human blood. Blood given for evil only brings evil. The evil messengers have done what they are required to do. Evil has befallen Loma Land and all the lands around. The earthen pot full of milk is broken, spilled milk cannot be gathered. What a waste this is! Waste to you and Loma Land. The Mother Earth laughs. What a blessing, she says, “To me it is given and gladly I receive.”

“But you, Luwopu, will soon join your ancestors. You can no longer help or save Loma Land. Things to come will not please you; it is best you don’t see them or experience them. Cross over, that is the best you can do. The gods have spoken. The gods have seen. We have answered your quest. Free us and be ready for your crossing.

“The forest has been hewed. The trees are cut down. The logs cannot be replanted. They are only good for the fire.”

“Arise my daughter, you have heard our answer. Go in peace, for the earthen pot has been broken and the milk has run out.”

Grandmother has been transfixed with eyes closed: she was in the world of the gods in her shrine. She awoke, and knew she was there with them in their world, the world of all awareness, the world of know it all, the world unseen by mortal humanity. She was there with them. She, like them, saw the future, heard it and now must face humanity, ignorant humanity. “What shall I say to my people? Will they hear, will they understand, will they believe?”

She took a heavy deep breath as she walked out of the inner chamber of her shrine and shut the door with gentleness.

Chapter 12

Uncle Flumo in Zorzor

Uncle Flumo sat on the front bench before the Lutheran pastors. After the training, they would go out and spread the message. He was baptized three months ago in the Zorzor Lutheran church.

“I am now a child of God. I have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God. I have been washed in His blood. I am saved, yes, I am”

“My village shall hear my first sermon and perhaps my sister and her sons, those hard headed sons, will become Christians. I will be blessed for bringing them to Christ. For now, they are like sheep being led to the slaughter. I will study harder and harder still. They must be saved. Yes they must, and who is the best for the job of teaching them? There is only one answer, only one person, Flumo. That is my village, those are my people. I must bring them to Christ. Amen, Amen,” he shouted. “Thank you Jesus.”

Pastor Clifford turned to look at Joe, another pastor, and said, “Are you alright Brother Flumo?”

“Yes sir, I was only thinking out loud,” Flumo said with a broad smile.

“Tell the class your thoughts next Sunday,” Pastor Clifford said.

After praying, they left the church. At home in a two-bedroom house, Uncle Flumo untied his blue necktie and loosened the cuffs of his white long sleeve shirt. He looked down at his brand new black shoes. “Times have changed,” he mused and sat on his bed asking his wife about lunch.

The day has been a very long one and the study about the god's son was interesting. Uncle Flumo would review his lessons after lunch. He would then tell his

wife all he has been taught about, the Christ child, his mother Mary, Joseph the husband of Mary, the story about the Holy Spirit. He would tell all.

His wife was also a new convert to the faith. They have been married only a month after Uncle's return from our village.

"What have we for lunch?" he inquired.

Komasa was neatly dressed in her white dress that ended three inches below her knees. She was high yellow and her parents were Fulanis from Mali. They were Muslims and so was Komasa before she met her lover man, Uncle Flumo. As they say, love is blind and lovers are blinder still.

Fatima, for that was her given name by her parents, looked at Flumo with the eyes of admiration and love... Love that she did not understand and did not try to. But each time she saw him, something deep within her knew this was her man, her husband, her only life mate. How, why, when, she could not understand nor explain and did not care to. Funny ways are those of love and we humans must obey.

She smiled, remembering a day not long ago. It was a Sunday; one could hear the church bells ringing. Fatima's heart was leaping like a racing horse. The bells reminded her of Uncle Flumo dressed in his white long-sleeve shirt and blue trowsers. His shoes were shiny black and his necktie the color of his shoes. He would, she thought, be ready for church. "Oh how I wish to see him just to look upon his face and hear his laughter, the sound that will last forever in my spirit. My first day in his arms! I hope it will be soon!"

He had not yet told her of his feelings, but Fatima knew that soon, very soon, Flumo would speak.

"I am a born Muslim and I know Allah is great. I also know that Jesus lives, and He is the Savior of the world," she said in whispering tones.

Fatima's parents were devout Muslims and so were her three brothers. They prayed daily. The five daily prayers were never missed in Allahajii Mumuni's house. Allah is great and there is no other God but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. This Allahajii taught his family. He also taught that Mohammed was the last prophet. There were none to come after him.

Fatima had heard these teachings for many, many years. Did she believe in them or was she praying the five daily prayers and listening to the teachings for fear of her father?

She remembered hearing that any member of his family who did not perform the five daily prayers and did not believe in Allah and his prophet would be disowned. “A disbeliever cannot live under my roof,” he always said.

“There is only one true God. The highest of all spirits. He is the creator of the heavens and the earth.”

Chapter 13

Fatima in the Forrest

“He has created all things, living and non-living. The Muslims call him “Allah.” The Christians call him “God.” They also call him the All Mighty. We all worship the same God and refer to him in different names according to the languages we speak. We are all one people and God All Mighty is our heavenly father.”

Flumo was thinking these things as he watched Fatima walk by on the path into the forrest. The distance was only a stone’s throw from the church and from Fatima’s house. Uncle had seen her going to the forest for firewood and had followed her quietly.

“How are you, pretty woman?” he had said. Her heart leaped with concealed joy, as she turned and responded to his greeting.

“Let me help you. Loma men do not like to see their women doing such hard work. This is work for your brothers. Why are they not here to help you?”

“They have gone to tend to the cows,” she told him.

Uncle neatly tied the pieces of the firewood into a big bundle and took it to Fatima’s house. She walked behind him with the cutlass in her left hand as she admired his strength and felt his love, his untold love.

“I will help you any time you wish. Just let me know,” he said, and gently kissed her on each cheek. He slowly let go of her hands and said, “I love you Komasa, I have always loved you, since that day I saw you at your Ramadan celebration.”

She stood there as if glued to the earth as he walked to the church and turned only to look at her pretty face... the face he would soon hold gently in his palms, if God All Mighty agrees. “I love that woman, Fatima. Komasa shall be her name.”

Chapter 14

Living as a Christian

It was Sunday again and Uncle Flumo has not seen Fatima since the day he had helped her with the firewood. He would pass by her house and catch a glimpse of her before going to service. That pretty face would make his day and would remind him most vividly to pray for her, for their union. These thoughts made him happy.

The church drew nearer, for he was walking fast toward it. The bells were ringing and Uncle knew that soon Pastor Clifford would be on his way. He had to be in church praying when the Pastor arrived.

He was kneeling down, his head and elbows resting on the bench. "O Lord God All Mighty, save us from ignorance, strife and grief, free us from wickedness and stop the killing through human sacrifice to ancestor gods for the wants of power, fame and greed. Most of all, Lord God, if it pleases you let Fatima be my wife, my life mate. Together we will worship you in truth and in spirit and in the beauty of holiness. Amen."

He got up and stood by the window still deep in thought, as he reviewed the recent Sunday lessons in his head. I must believe that god has a begotten son without any human intervention. I must believe that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost. She, Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. Faith is the key in this religion, not brains, not reasoning, just faith.

My mother will regard me a stupid Loma man, who has lost the ability to think. She will say that, I have gone mad. Mother will spend nights in the shrine begging the gods to set me free from mental bondage. She will probably ask me to repeat my initiation. These were his thoughts as he stood there in the house of God All Mighty.

Uncle was very sober minded about the things of the spirit. He had studied the Ten Commandments and knew them by heart. He did his best to live by them. Pastor Clifford said, "We must be practicing Christians. We must be Christ-like. Knowing the

commandments is not enough. We, as Christians must live by them. The commandments must be our way of life, for Christ is our perfect example.”

Uncle loved Pastor Clifford’s teachings and truly considered him a man of God, a worshiper of the true God. He had often told the Pastor, “I want to be like you. I want to be a true man of God.” Pastor Clifford had always said, “Be like Christ our Lord and Savior; we are only humans and have our faults our secret sins. Faults, Uncle understood very well, but he did not understand secret sins. Do we have to commit them? Will the Heavenly Father forgive us for committing them, these “secret sins?” These questions he would ask the Pastor next Sunday.

The Pastor preached this Sunday about committing adultery. He said it was a great sin before the Father. His face turned red when he touched on this subject and he perspired profusely as his trembling voice fell and rose.

Mrs. Clifford and her son were sitting in the front row and heard all her husband said. Occasionally, she joined in with the “Amen” when the Pastor touched on husbands loving their wives whole-heartedly as Christ loved the church. “We are the ambassadors of Christ,” Pastor Clifford concluded and the congregation stood up for prayer.

On this day five visitors have come from the US to visit the church. They each had something to say before the Pastor ascended the pulpit. They basically spoke about the mother church in New York and they gave thanks to Pastor Clifford and his wife for work well done in bringing the heathen of Africa to Christ.

There were three huge boxes which the visitors brought. After the service, Pastor Clifford said, “I want all of you to stand in line, for there is a very good surprise for all of us.” They did as he said. The boxes were opened and the Pastor with the help of the visitors distributed white T-shirts to every member of the church. Each T-shirt bore the picture of the Christ on the cross in the colors of blue and red. The congregation was very happy and praised the white women who have brought Christ to them. This is the religion where there is no slitting of throats of chickens to appease the gods. It is a religion where there are no more human sacrifices. The blood of slaves or of the free no longer pleases the gods; for Christ has paid it all. He is the sacrifice for the world. Truly, these are the people of the highest God, my uncle thought. This thought made him

happy; and he certainly shared it with Komasa when he gave her the T-shirts. There were enough T-shirts even for those members who did not come to the service that eventful Sunday.

Chapter 15

Ordination

Uncle and the other students will receive their certificate next Sunday. They were twelve in number. These shepherds would soon be sent to twelve villages to preach, to teach, and to educate the villagers about the love of the highest God, who sent his son to die for the world. These were Uncle Flumo's thoughts. What a happy day that would be, for my dear Uncle. He would come to his own village and establish the house of god and call his people to worship there.

It will come to pass soon very soon, my uncle thought. And so it was on that happy Sunday morning, the twelve were adorned in their priestly garments. They were all dressed in their new, brand new holy attire; these happy twelve. The Pastor was well dressed too. He called each by their Christian names. Names, they have been given at baptism. "Therefore old things are passed away; behold all things are new." Pastor Clifford said.

The church was filled. The one hundred and fifty two benches were all occupied. Many of the worshippers had to stand at the back row in the church.

It was a good day. The morning was cool. The sun was slowly bringing its heat with calm brightness. The congregation stood as the head Pastor walked in. The members of the congregation were like students before their teacher.

Indeed, Pastor Clifford was a good teacher and a good Pastor too. Each Sunday, he was leading his flock to Christ. His church was a spirit-filled one, where on Sundays, one would hear the shouts of "Amen, Amen" from far away. Today, this Sunday, the good Pastor will anoint these twelve, making them fishers of men, women and children. They will be pastors who will lead the father's sheep to greener pastures.

The twelve knelt down before Pastor Clifford as he touched the crown of each head and anointed the foreheads with holy oil, in the shape of a cross. He then prayed for them and as they rose to their feet the crowd shouted, “Amen, Amen!”

All of a sudden it began to rain, and the people sang “Showers of blessing.”

Chapter 16

The Crossing

Grandmother called me by my first name as she did when there was a serious matter she wanted me to hear about. “Come into my chambers and draw the three legged chair nearer to my bed, that you may fully hear my words and absorb their meanings within your spirit.” I did as she requested me and waited patiently. Then she parted her lips and began to speak.

“Son of my daughter, tomorrow I will cross over. My duties on this earth I have completed. I have served humanity as demanded by the gods, and by our ancestors. I will always be with you, and with all those who call me in times of need. If they do not call, I will still help you and them when needed.” She was dressed in her best attire, the newest that has come from the weavers. She has never dressed like this before. It was the first time she has ever worn the purple that ended at her ankles.

The pleasant scent of leafy dye filled the air within her chambers. “Go now, Quiwu, and tell your mother to prepare palava sauce with rice, the way I love it. When she has finished, bring mine to me in the new calabash that has never been used before. I know you will do what I have required of you. Go in peace and dwell on my words.” This was the first and only time I have seen my grandmother sad. Her eyes were red and teary as she spoke to me. The voice was calm and low.

“The gods tell me that your uncle has taken upon himself the ways of those strange people you call, “white men.” He now worships in their shrine. Soon, he will become one of their priests. By the end of the harvest, he will come here. The white men will send him to spread the message of their gods. They will fill the heads of our children’s children with nonsense. The Loma culture will be gone forever to remain only a story to be told by the fireside in the open kitchen. The white men will violate our women mixing their blood with the unique spirit and blood of our people. Initiation will

be frowned upon and cultural bonds will be broken. Humanity will be broken. There will be no more honor for our heroes and brave men. Our mothers and womanhood will not be respected anymore. As for my son, the first fruit of my womb, Flumo, I will drive the sharpest poisoned spear through his heart before he opens his mouth to spoil the village with his words. I must cross over. I would rather be with our ancestors than to be here and destroy my own son. His blood will not be upon me but upon those who have turned him against himself and his people. But you, Quiwu, must remain yourself, living and doing those things Lomas do. You are now Loma Land; you are the eyes and ears of our people. The gods will guide and protect you. You shall live long and wisdom shall be your best friend. Your words shall flow even beyond the big waters. You are the eagle. Fly high and never land in the dust of human misery. I am always with you. Go now and on the morrow, I will crossover.”

After she spoke these words, my heart was filled with sorrow, for Grand Ma had never spoken to me in this manner. She gently waved her hand; I shut the door behind me and walked in deep silence.

The feast of the rice harvest will be soon. “Only a week away,” my brother said. But I was quiet, very quiet. Grandmother was in my thoughts. Her words kept coming back to me. In my mind and in my heart, I heard her calm and powerful voice. It was like the spirit, which follows one everywhere. One does not see it but one is aware of its presence.

“What did Grandmother say to you? Has she been drinking coffee with goat milk and honey? Why are you so quiet?” my brother asked. He has never been close to Grandmother. He always thought she was half spirit and half human. He thought she was mad; yes, mad, not much but just a little mad. Anyone who sits alone and talks to herself and laughs as if conversing with a familiar and invisible friend, that one must be mad or talking to spirits. My brother kept his distance from Grandma, although she was harmless. He only came near her in my presence.

“Is that all she does, talk to spirits, drink coffee with goat milk and tell the future of people? She never eats any of our chickens, her cows, sheep and goats. She eats only

fish and hardly ever eats any of the delicious soups Mother cooks. That surely is selfishness. She works alone and cooks her own food. What was she telling you now?"

"Our uncle will soon be coming to our village to preach and teach us the villagers the 'word of God.'

God, which god? The white man's god and the godson with a human mother? That god does not have a friend, a wife, that god?"

"Yes that god."

"Uncle surely has taken upon himself the way of the foreigner. He will not last long here, for grandmother will kill him, all by herself. He is truly running away from himself. How can one do that? It is best for him not to come. Grandmother will drive one of her spears through his heart."

Mother had just come out from her hut and asked us, "Where is Grandmother? She is sleeping too late this morning. Have you made her coffee?" Mother said pointing to me. My brother and I looked at each other not knowing what to say.

"She is usually up before any of us, go and knock at her door. She may be up but probably looking into the future. This is her pastime. Go now, Quiwu, and do as I have spoken."

I knocked gently and called "Grandma" over and over but no one answered nor was the door opened. Repeating this action the fourth time, I knew something was wrong. She has told me the evening before that she was crossing over and by this morning she would be gone. This, indeed, must be the truth. Grandmother Luopu has gone to the world of the gods, the spirits. She has joined the ancestors. These were my fears, my thoughts, and my anger. Fear, because I did not want to lose her physically. She was my friend, my protector and my teacher. I wished these thoughts would leave me alone. I was angry because Uncle Flumo has left our culture. He was now a worshipper of the white man's god. I wished that he had come before Grandmother's crossing. A Loma man is better off dead than a coward, a "no good." The one who remains in his culture, when such a one has crossed over, joy fills the hearts of the spirits, and they are in one accord of "that one." The ancestors are proud in receiving such a

good and faithful one. The spear would have been driven through his heart, but he would have died a true Loma man, the pride of both gods and the ancestors.

Our father must come now and open the door. He is the right one to do so. He will let us know what has befallen Grandmother. Has she crossed over, as is our lot? For we all one at a time came into this world and one at a time will cross over. May our crossings be like Grandmother's. May we become pure spirits. May our gods accept us with gladness, for our sorrows and woes on this earth will have ended. What a new life may it be without the heavy loads of human flesh! We can be wherever we wish to be, do what we wish to do, be everything and keep our identity. Thoughts will become our means of travel. As we think so will it be.

Father came and we told him what had happened. The doors to grandmother's chambers were forced opened. There in the inner chamber, on her bed, she lay, stiff and cold. She was still dressed in her beautiful robe. Her eyes were closed as if at sleep.

In dead sleep, she was, eternally.

Chapter 17

Letting Go

There were to be no tears shed for her because she was a Zoe. She was not dead, she had crossed over, from this world to that of the spirits, and the gods. I was sad the way her body laid with her hands still under her head as a pillow as she lay on her side. Father allowed me to go into the chamber with him and see for myself what had become of my best friend. Will I be stiff and cold when one day I cross over?

Lifelessness brings about stiffness. So was my grandmother's body, still and cold as silent as a stone. Our conversations have ended so quietly and quickly; I could not believe she was gone.

My friend, Mama Luopu, has crossed over. She knew that the days ahead would be dangerous, confusing and that wickedness would abound. Deceit, immorality and disorderliness would soon be the music of the world. In the days to come a son will sell his own mother for a cowrie and a brother will sell his brother or sister into slavery for five pieces of cowrie. She knew that sadness and gloom would soon fill the earth. She also knew that human dignity and value would become history for humans; for humans will be cruel to humans. They will butcher one another like meat in the name of war. Greed, jealousy, selfishness and envy will rule the human heart. The world was no longer good enough for her.

As fish cannot live out of water for long, so was my grandmother. She could not live to see her children, Loma people and Loma land taken away by the foreigner, the intruder, the white man and his culture. She knew the end of one kingdom has come and the beginning of another kingdom was on its way. She pitied us, poor, people. He who

rules the mind rules the body. When honor is gone the man is dead. A man whose mind is ruled by other men is worse than a slave. He who cannot control his own household surely cannot rule a country. A wise man is known by his words and deeds.

Loma culture was on the way to destruction and no amount of sacrifices could stop it. The evil has been done and justice must be done, divine justice. Truly, things have changed and change will remain constant.

The sun was now directly above our heads, it was the noon day sun. The chiefs and Zoes from the nearby villages and afar have all come. The news of grandmother's crossing over, they all have heard and for this, they all came.

Our village for two days was over-populated. Grandmother was known in many villages beyond the Lofa River. She was one of the richest woman in Loma land. Wherever the name Mama Luopu was mentioned, people imagined bags of cowries, hundred heads of cattle, goats, and sheep, thousands of chickens and guinea fowls. There were too many to be counted. For she did not only own these animals in our village alone, but in many other villages beyond the Lofa River. She was also known for her kindness. Where the poor had cried, she also wept. Wherever the needy were sad she gave freely. When there was a just cause for laughter, she laughed the most. Wherever there was just cause for sorrow, she deeply mourned. She was the friend for the friendless, mother to the motherless, and true Loma Zoe. Many spirits knew her, for she conversed with them nightly. She knew them by name and reputation. They were friends, greater friends even now.

The Zoes stood in line according to their genders and powers. They were powerful men and women who obeyed the laws of the gods. They were servants of the gods and brothers and sisters to humanity. These great ones have come to Grandmother's burial. They were dressed in the tradition of Loma Zoes. The most powerful Zoes were dressed in red robes, the less powerful in yellow and the lesser in blue. The latter were students to the red. They too would wear the red when the time came.

They stood in lines of three around the mat upon which my grandmother laid. The drummers drummed lightly and the Zoes sang:

“May our ancestors bless your crossing.

May you cross seven rivers, may you reach the tops of seven mountains.

May you cross the Lofa River seven times. Visit us when we call you.”

We know you wear the clothing you wore on the earth.

It belongs to this earth and here it will stay.

We are forever yours.

You are always near.”

They sang this song slowly and solemnly and it brought tears to many watery eyes. She lay there on the mat. She was now sleeping forever for good.

The body lay on the new woven mat and the Zoes spoke these words, “ You have healed many wounded bodies and souls. Your wisdom has been ours in this world of ignorance and darkness. Be the same to us in the world of spirits. Wipe our tears when we cry. Show us what to do when we are confused or in this world of many woes. Be by our side in times of need. Go in peace, our elder. Let your joys be our joy. Come quickly when we implore you. Take us by the hand and lead us in the world of spirits when we cross over. So be it, so be it, so be it.”

The Zoes were all in tears when they recited these words. They were all in a somber mood and stood around the body, which would soon be swallowed by the belly of the earth. The drummers kept on drumming as their loose cowrie shell bracelets jingled on their sweaty wrists.

The head woman Zoe started the dance, the burial dance. The women, all dressed in purple and yellow robes, began to clap their hands in unison and singing in these words, “In your name we have come. To you we have come. Your silence has called us. Your eternal peace has won us. Your motherly love has drawn us closer to you. Be our voice when we become silent. May your spears never be bloody again. Oh silent one, the seer of greater worlds, we can never say goodbye. You are closer to us than our hands.”

The tears ran down the cheeks. Even the men shed tears. The mood of the gathering was like that of sheep who have lost their shepherd. These sheep stood in one position demanding a shepherd. Who would be the next Luopu to lead these sheep?

As the Zoes sang, they moved three steps towards the mat according to the beat of the drum. Soon the crowd began to do the same. The spirit of the music entered into the midst of the people. The entire village was rocking from side to side as they moved, three steps forward and three steps away from the mat, upon which my Grandmother lay. Was it the music, the songs, the songs, and their meanings or was it that powerful beat of the drums that took hold of the people? They danced from morning to noon. The sun was high directly overhead as its rays beamed down on the dancers drenched in sweat.

The head Zoe began to clap his hands high above his head. Those who saw him in this action told these closer by, and soon the crowd got the message and the music and the singing finally came to the end. They were quiet again like my grandmother who lay on the mat.

Many new mats were spread on the ground and upon them the people sat according to rank and class. Again, they sat in rows of three forming a very large circle around the mat upon which my grandmother lay.

The head Zoe of the men was dressed in a new red robe; his crown was made of pure white country cloth with a streak of red in the middle.

He spoke: "Our elders say, Hunger weakens the flesh and strengthens the spirit. I believe we are tired, now and hungry too. It is time to fulfill one of nature's calls."

So the crowd was split up into divisions of three. There were six hundred and thirty three in all, including the children. The people sat down on the mats forming a complete circle around the mats where foods were placed and silently ate.

The Zoes are like the seasons, which come and go. Their memories remain in the hearts and minds of the people. It is stated that Zoes never die, they only cross over.

Two moons have gone by since the Zoes lowered Grandmother's body into the earth and covered it with red clay. A round flat stone, a foot in circumference was placed at the head of the grave and thirty-three cowries were placed at the head of the grave arranged in rows of three. No one from our village or other villages would ever dream of

taking a single one of these shells. The spirits would strike such a one with total madness.

They all knew “the law”; they were Lomas.

Many moons have gone by, but the memory of my dear friend, my guide, my teacher, rests with me. She has not gone, for I feel her presence, I see her and hear her words, those words, whose meaning only silence can explain. Their wisdom fills me with spiritual joy, and my strength is renewed, my faith is complete. We never die. We only move on to greater worlds, to fonder lands where there is no difference between night and day.

Therefore I comfort myself in these thoughts as Grandmother and I walk hand in hand beyond the bounds of this earthly existence. There is no death. Close your eyes and you will behold all things!

So why fear that which does not exist? Why create evil when goodness is all? Be pure in your thoughts and you will be pure in your actions.

These words of my sage are eternal music to my ears, to my whole being. They are the blankets I sleep on. As light dispels darkness so does wisdom dispel ignorance and the night is gone when the light of day appears. Words never taste of death for they are spirits. I dwell in wisdom; for this reason I have come!

Chapter 18

Uncle Flumo to The Village

He stood in the pulpit, a tall, well-built man. This was Pastor Clifford. Although he was in his late fifties, he was strong and bore the nickname, “Strong man of God.” Here, on this occasion, he was introducing Uncle Flumo, the preacher of the day, one of the new shepherds to be dispatched soon to his own village. Here the shepherd would speak to the villagers in their own language. This new Loma preacher -- what is it that he would tell these people? The story about the godson and his mother, Mary, whom no man had touched but became pregnant by a spirit who wore no human flesh; but he the son was born in the hut full of dry grass and cow dung where the cows slept? What could he really tell them that was new and befitting their hearing?

“There is only one true god and his son came to save us from our sins.”

The villagers would laugh him to scorn. These thoughts went through his head as he sat there in the church listening to Pastor Clifford as he introduced him to the congregation.

The congregation stood up jubilantly and a great storm of amen, amen could be heard miles away. After five minutes of this, the crowd, like dust, settled down, and silence fell upon the church like dew in the harmattan in early December.

Uncle Flumo ascended the pulpit and began to speak.

“My brothers and my sisters in Christ, I greet you in the name of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, who came and died for us; whose love has brought salvation and whose blood, precious blood, most holy and precious...” Uncle could not continue his statement; he was overwhelmed by emotions, and by the spirit. “ Me, a Loma man believing this nonsense, this beautiful white man’s fairy tale befitting only for children.

They would listen and believe? Not Loma children whose grandfathers and mothers have told them Loma fireside stories. Stories about Gods and Goddesses. Stories about the lions and the elephants and how they became friends. Stories about the man who wanted to marry the most beautiful girl in the village of Barziwen. The parents agreed to give him their daughter in marriage. They made a request.

“Bring us the whiskers of an adult male living lion. We want seven whiskers of a living healthy lion. When you have done this we will agree for you to marry our daughter. This is the only bride price we want from you.”

These are the stories to teach morals. These are the stories that drive sense into the heads of the Loma children. These are the stories that teach knowledge and draw the children closer to knowledge and wisdom. These are the stories that teach bravery. Yes they make sense. For they are applicable to daily lives of all ages in the village.

The congregation in Zorzor has been trained to listen and believe in such sermons like the one Uncle Flumo was about to preach. Faith was the key; not reason. They heard such sermons each Sunday and were used to the system. After the sermons the baskets are passed around, and dimes and dollars are dropped in the basket. They make their offering to the Lord. They knew this and this they did every Sunday.

But nevertheless they wanted to listen to this Loma man and his farewell message; for he would be going soon to the village, his own village to preach the words of the white man’s god to his own people. They wanted to hear what he had to say. Has he been a good student, and has Pastor Clifford been a good teacher?

Uncle Flumo began to preach. “Our God is great and greatly to be praised. He has delivered us from the power of sin and death and has brought us eternal salvation through his son Jesus Christ. Christ is the way, the truth and the light. In him there is no darkness and his love he has shared with us. For what greater love can there be than a man gives his life for the sins of the world? He died that we may have life; and have it in abundance. There is no greed in him; there is no selfishness in him. He is the holy lamb whose blood was shed for the sins of the world. The perfect sacrifice, he was. The Son of God, the sign of unblemished love, that, he is. O, my brothers and sisters, O, my friends, our god is love and today he extends that love, that perfect and unblemished love

to all of us. If there is one of you here today who has not received the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal savior, let him, let her, boy, girl, woman or man, let them come. Let that one come forward. If you have not received Jesus Christ as your personal savior this is the time now. This is the moment. Come to your Lord, come to life. Come to the throne of grace. Thank you Jesus, thank you Lord.”

When Uncle finished his sermon, there were more than eighty persons, sinners kneeling down before the pulpit, seeking for salvation. This took place in Zorzor, in the big shrine of the white man.

Pastor Clifford was smiling. He shook Uncle’s hand vigorously and said, Well done my son, well done. You are a powerful preacher and the village will surely need you. May our God continue to guide you, bless you and protect you, in your entire going out and your coming in. You are truly blessed and you shall be a blessing to many.”

Uncle was very happy and proud. Happy, because he was now a trained preacher, a shepherd whose flock would soon grow large in number in our village and in other villages too. He knew how to read the English Bible and understood most of what he read. He was proud that others will call him Pastor Flumo.

Flumo was also perplexed, because he did not know how the villagers would receive him. Would they accept him as a “man of God” and listen to the sermons? Would they say he is one of the grand children of Mama Luwopu, the great Zoe who heals every sickness, the best midwife we have ever known in these parts, across the Loffa River and beyond?

Would they throw stones at him and call him names; liar, deceiver, and a sell out? These thoughts created confusion in his Christian and Loma mind. The invisible battles of varying cultures was raging in his mind. But he was strong in his resolve. As men lead horses to the creek to drink water so too will he lead the sheep to the foot of the cross. The Lord Jesus himself would take it from there. He would say, “I have done what I was trained to do. I believe and I know that many will believe. The Lord will be my guide, my protector and my only true friend. He will lead me beside the still water. He will surely comfort me and I, Pastor Flumo, will fear no evil.” These were his conclusions. As he stood there dressed in his white long sleeves shirt, blue long trousers

and a purple tie, a pair of brown shoes. Old things are passed away, behold all things are new.

Many events and temptations awaited him in Letesu, Barziwen, Luyema and many other Loma villages.

Chapter 19

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

“With God all things are possible. He that loses his life for the truth shall find it; and he that saves his life for falsehood shall lose it.” So the Bible says. What is truth and what is falsehood? Each culture has its truths and falsehoods. Jesus Christ is the son of God, born of a virgin, called Mary. This is the truth for the Christian. We Lomas know that spirits exist. Some we worship and some we appease for our wants and needs. For a virgin to have a child without the intervention of a man in the sexual act, is a falsehood to Loma minds.

Uncle Flumo was now between the proverbial rock and the hard place. He will never disregard his Initiation which has made him a true Loma man. But he has given his life to Christ; his Lord and Savior. Although he thought on these matters, the spirit of Initiation, of Loma-ness, his culture, his Life, the only way of life he has ever known and lived as a boy and as a man remained strong. A truly confused world this is.

Why don't humans live together as one? Why Loma Land? Why Kissi Land? Why Kpelle Land? Why White People? Why Black People? Why not people, just people, with one world, one faith, one culture. One big world happy family! Why not? Why not? Uncle's mind was loaded with questions.

Perhaps it would have been best if he had not entered the white man's shrine in Zorzor. Perhaps it would have been better if he had stayed in his own village. Life on earth is full of troubles with only a few days to live it. But the Lord did not say it would be easy. He said “with God all things are possible.” He closed his eyes and lay across the bed still fully dressed. His wife walked slowly by the bed and knelt down beside him quietly; “Flumo, Flumo, are you awake?”

“I am now that you have rudely awakened me from my sweet slumber.” he said as he sat up on the bed. Komasa sat by him; placing her arms around his shoulders. “Um, that feels good;” he said and drew closer to her. Their thoughts were twin as their bodies played it out. Their warm lips met. He slowly, gently laid her on the bed; and rubbing her thighs gently, their flesh took the best of them. They awoke in the middle of the night by the call of the roosters. This is the third time they have made Love.

The first time, she had gone to gather fire wood in the bush. He has seen her and has followed her but at a distance. “You are alone again. Why do you always come alone? Your brothers never come with you.”

“They have other important things to do and I am not far from the house. Any one wishing to harm me could not; because my cries and shouts for help could be heard by those in the house and houses near-by.”

“I have come to help you again.” he said as he stretched his arms, gently taking the cutlass from her, and drawing her closer to himself. She did not flinch or pull away from him. His arms were around her and he drew her ever closer. They lay on the dried grass.

“Flumo, Flumo,” she called him softly, gently, slowly. They have both lost reasoning and their warm passions became their reason. It was all over in a few sweet minutes; and he knew she was a virgin. He was her first man.

Time is restless and moves on. Two years have passed since their wedding. And now, the green Jeep has stopped in the middle of our village. Uncle Flumo opened the front door on his side and gets out of the Jeep, whispering to the driver; “Wait in the Jeep, I will be back soon.” The back seats were full of many pamphlets, all Christian literature. There were bibles of all colors and sizes. This was the village of his birth. This was his home. Here he must first bring the good news of God’s Kingdom. He was now a Pastor, a Preacher of the Good News. He knew he must share first with his own people. He walked briskly towards the chief’s house, with the New Testament in his hand. It was the farming season again and most of the people, villagers, have gone to their farms; leaving the village almost empty.

There were only two elders in the Chief's place, a guard, and his wife. Uncle Flumo met the old bearded man at the gate who, after the greetings, let him in. The old man pulled a big gourd of palm wine from under the bench upon which they were sitting. He called his wife for two clean calabashes.

She was dressed in her new yellow and black striped robe. Mawu knelt down as she presented the calabashes to her husband. He took them in his right hand. Mawu left and the old man began to make oblation to the Ancestors. Old Man Moluba dug a small hole in the ground about two inches deep and an inch wide. He poured some of the wine in one of the calabashes and bending over the hole, he began with these words "To You who sees through the eyes of the night, to You to whom day is night and night is day, to You who knows our thoughts before we even think of thinking them, to You who guards and directs our steps, to You, who no longer fear death, to You who grant us children and joy: we cannot eat, drink and smell the good wine without offering it to You first. O, Pure spirit, take this drink and partake in our meeting, with Flumo, a son of the soil of this village."

After these words he poured some palm wine in the hole. At the end, Old Man Moluba emptied the calabash of sweet wine in the hole and the dry earth absorbed it all. This was the sign that the ancestors have partaken in the drinking of the wine. Uncle sat quietly thinking to himself, "What a waste, all that good wine thrown in the hole. The full calabash. The Bible teaches that there is only one true God and Jesus Christ is his only begotten son. He is the savior of the world." He thought these words as he patiently waited for his share of the palm wine. His throat itched and he knew that the good strong wine would be the best healer for the itch. The old man now poured the wine in both calabashes up to the brims and handed one to Uncle Flumo. Uncle drank it slowly and thanked Mr. Moluba when the calabash was empty. The old man refilled both calabashes again and handed one to Uncle Flumo, followed by these words, "Wine makes a man lively, happy and brave. But too much of a thing is evil. The chief will not be in for a while. I will tell him what your message is. He has travelled for a week. You are one of the sons of this village. Tell me now your reason for wanting to see the chief. The elders say one must crack the boiled egg, peel of the shell before eating it. They also say "one

can not eat the yoke of the raw egg from its opened shell without mixing it with the white.”

Flumo replied, “My message is simple and clear,. The time has come when we as a people must change because time has changed, and is changing still.

The old man added, “Time is like the rivers and creeks that flow ceaselessly all the time and one never sees a river or creek that flows up stream.”

The old man refilled the two calabashes again and handed one of them to Uncle Flumo adding, “The garbage that one has to bury should not be allowed to sit too long; for the chickens will soon scatter it. Walking means putting one foot in front of the other in the same direction continuously in order to get to a determined destination.” The old man and Uncle Flumo both placed their empty calabashes on the small tables before them. By this time, their stomachs were beginning to feel warm and their heads felt light. “Wine makes people happy they both remembered.”

“No one buys Piglets in a bag. Bring your piglets out of the bag and I will tell you whether the chief and the villagers will buy them.” Uncle Flumo knew exactly what the old man was implying. He decided to test the waters.

Chapter 20

The First Convert

Mr. Moluba would be his first convert; and perhaps his wife too. They would be the first Christians in his own village. Or so Flumo hoped. He said, “I am the first son of Mama Luopu, the chief lady herbalist and Zoe in this village. She crossed over a year ago and I could not come for the ceremony of her crossing. Today, I have come to tell the village why I could not come, on such an important occasion. There was something more important than the crossing over ceremony. I was doing the Lords work. This the most important reason of my coming. I have come to bring light unto my people in this village, and in many other villages. As I said before, we must change with the changing times. Nothing remains constant. Things are always changing. Even you, Mr. Moluba you were young; today you are old. The chicks hatched from the eggs today, soon become roosters and hens. Seeds are planted, they grow into trees. Things change because of time. Remember, when a strong wind is blowing the tree that refuses to bend must break. I have come that they shall have life more abundantly so says the Lord.”

The old man poured more palm wine into both calabashes. He handed one to Uncle Flumo and called his wife for the other. She came out of the kitchen and knelt down before her husband as she took the calabash full of sparkling white wine with her right hand from her husband. She stood up. “May our ancestors bless you my husband, for you have always remembered me. May you be blessed and remembered on the day of your crossing.” When she had spoken these words, she returned to the kitchen, for she was cooking.

The old man waited patiently as Uncle Flumo drank the wine slowly with very much joy. Seeing that the calabash was empty, Uncle called the old man and said “I have had enough” to which the old man replied, “Your words are strange to my ears, although you speak Loma. What Lord are you talking about? What light is he going to bring

about? We have the sunlight and sometimes the moonlight. What other light are you talking about? Your words take strange meanings.

A few years ago, you were a child running around naked in the rainy season with the other children as your small manhood dangled loosely between your thighs. You ran without shame. Today, you have come from Zorzor, only a stone's throw from our own village to teach us. What can you tell us that we have never heard? You said you have a message. Please deliver it. My ears are opened and I will listen carefully to your strange words and hope for better meanings in them. A child that sits constantly among elders soon learns the meanings of many proverbs and parables. Perhaps you have something new to tell us not of this culture and certainly not from Loma Land.

I will convey your message to the chief when he returns tomorrow. Tell me and the whole village will hear. What befalls one in our village befalls all in the village. When one child is sick the whole village is sick. We are one People, one Loma Land. Now what is your message?"

Chapter 21

Flumo's Message

Uncle listened carefully, thinking what to say. The old man had much wine in him and so did Uncle Flumo. They were not drunk. No, far from it. The wine awakened their understanding and made their brains more active. And the old man continued.

“A child who teaches his parents must have come from a higher world of spirits, one of those incarnations whose love for ignorant humanity has forced them back to earth. Those we know; we can foresee their spirits before they take on human flesh and return to us. You are not one of those. Your mother Luopu was and we knew her by her works. The sages told us of her birth and who her parents would be. A mystic and sage are known to us by their deeds. Their deeds and works walk hand in hand as they nightly converse with the spirits, and the spirits do the same with them. You are not one of those, you are only a child of the village. You are one of your songs. What is your message?”

When he has spoken, Uncle knew Moluba was talking from his soul and he was deeply moved by the sincerity of perceived truth in the old man. Uncle knew that this was a good man; who wanted to warn him after hearing his message, it was he who would decide whether to tell the chief or not.

Mr. Moluba knew the chief very well. They were initiated together. They were of the same age. Furthermore, the chief was his best friend. Uncle Flumo did not know any of this. He had gone to Zorzor and lived there for six years. Many things have happened in the village in his absence. Flumo was now a stranger in his own village. The old man was eager to hear his message. Perhaps there was something good in it for the village and for Loma Land. He wanted to hear what Flumo had to say.

It was time for Flumo to speak. “In Zorzor, the white man's medicine saved my big toes from falling away. His medicine healed the rottenness, the pain and the sore that

were eating away my toes. The Zoes did what they knew but my sores and my rotted painful toes were not healed by them. It was the white man's medicine; yes, his powerful medicine healed my toes. I have learned to trust him. He has been good to me and has brought happiness to me. I once was sick but now I am healed by the white man's medicine.

Pastor Clifford, the white man, invited me to his shrine one Sunday and I went along. In fact, it was a big empty house with many benches on each side of the room; arranged neatly in rows. This is the largest shrine I have ever seen, but the altar is not stained with the blood of sacrificed animals. Above the altar there are two pieces of wood, one crossing the other and nailed neatly forming the sign Loma hunters make to show other hunters which directions to take. They can go East, West, North or South as indicated by the position of the sign. What do you use this sign for?

“This is called the cross. It represents a bigger cross upon which our savior died. He is the savior of the world and his name is Jesus Christ. He is the only begotten son of God All Mighty. He died for our sins; and if we believe in him and worship the father through him we go to heaven (Galata) when we die...

Pastor Clifford wanted to tell me more but people started to come into the shrine for the Sunday worship. It was interesting to me and the more I learned from Pastor Clifford the more I wanted to become part of the worship. That I have become. I have come to tell you all I know about this god and his son and about our salvation.”

Uncle could have continued, but the old man who all the while, had his eyes closed and was listening, opened his eyes. Then he said, “This is a strange message foreign to Loma Land and Loma ears; but the chief and the elders will tell you what they think about it tomorrow in the Palaver Hut, our meeting place for discussions.”

Uncle returned to the Jeep and found the driver asleep, resting his head on his folded arms on the steering wheel. He awakened him and they drove to Grandmother's yard. There, they got out of the Jeep. The door had been left ajar, for there were no thieves in the village. These were good days when honesty was King. It was only silence that greeted them; mother and the rest had gone to the farm.

Chapter 22

Meeting with the Chief

The chief Gabayan sat on his large three legged chair which was placed in the center of the leopard skin, the symbol of power. Upon his right wrist he wore a bracelet of twelve cowrie shells. There were twelve chiefs with him who came from other villages to listen to Flumo's message. Uncle began to speak by addressing the Chiefs and the elders who sat around the Palaver Hut.

"My fathers, my elders, the givers of the wisdom of our fathers, you who sit on the three legged chairs, upon the leopard skins that were handed to you by our fathers: I have brought deliverance to us all. I have brought a message from the King of Kings."

The village was silent and Uncle Flumo spoke with deep humility as the Chiefs and elders listened. "Our gods are powerful and are all spirits with different abilities. They all spring from the Lord of Spirits, Gaywologala, Almighty God, Creator and sustainer of all creations. We worship him through the lesser gods by offering sacrifices to appease them. There are times when we slaughter goats, sheep, chickens and cows depending on the importance of our needs. But yet, there are problems they cannot solve; like that of my big toes.

You all remember those days when my toes were rotted and full of running sores; the stench of which no one could bear. Wherever I went people held their noses. The children of the village nicknamed me "Rotten Toes." Our Zoes tried to heal me but they could not. They did not know the cause of those sores. I am not blaming you or the Zoes. There are times when we as a people, even with the help of the gods, come to nought. We must admit that there are problems we cannot solve; that is why change must come. That is why we need the ideas of other races. Changes are like the winds that blow or the sun which rises and shines. We cannot stop these changes. They must come.

It was the white man who through his powerful medicine healed my toes and saved my life. I speak not to condemn us or our gods; no never. There are causes to every problem in the world. Cause and effects walk hand in hand. Until we know the cause of a thing the effect remains. Because the white man knew the cause of my rotten toes, he knew the cure. This does not make him any smarter or wiser than you, Zoes and Elders.

The chief Gabayan was a tall man and as he sat on the highest three legged chair, he was even taller than all the rest seated around him. His figure was impressive. Uncle stood before the Chiefs as he spoke. A smaller chair was given him to sit on. He thanked the Chiefs and continued his speech. “God, through the white man has healed me. It is that God I am here to tell you about.”

The Chief, who had been listening quietly, now began to speak. “Before the white man was, we are. We have always been and will always be. Before the white man knew all-mighty God, the spirit from whom all other spirits spring we knew Gaywologala, our heavenly father. We worship Gaywologala through the lesser gods, who are represented by the mountains, the rivers, the big tall trees. When we pour libations upon these elements of nature, we are not worshiping them; we are worshiping Gaywologala whom we cannot see with our physical eyes. These elements of nature we see and they remind us of the greatness of Gaywologala; the most awesome of all the spirits. I am surprised that an initiated Loma man does not know these things. I know the Zoes who initiated you are all good men and good Zoes, good teachers of our culture. Have you forgotten who you are? Your mother, Mama Luopu is one of the greatest Zoes and herbalist in all of Loma Land. You are telling us, she taught you nothing but only cleaned your ass whenever you attended nature’s call? Or did she bend you over and allowed the dogs to enjoy themselves by wiping your ass with their tongues?”

There was laughter among the chiefs and those who stood by, but when the crowd had quieted, the chief continued to speak. “Now let me tell you the cause of your rotten toes. When you were fifteen, a year after your initiation, you raped the young daughter of Kpaku, one of the greatest zoes of our land. You were to be beheaded for disrespecting womanhood and causing great abomination in Loma Land. Your blood should have been used to appease the gods and purge the land upon which you committed your horrible act.

Your mother and all of the women Zoes pleaded for many days for us to forgive you. But the Zoe Kpaku, had already cursed you; and that was the cause of your rotten toes. He should have cursed your penis to be rotted, oozing blood and mucus for as long as you lived.”

The people laughed louder and louder for many minutes and only stopped laughing when the chief raised his right hand. “However,” the chief continued, “Kpaku lifted the curse before he crossed over; that is why you are healed. It is not the white man’s medicine nor his god or the god son who healed you. You are an ungrateful young man to us Loma people. Had your mother been here physically, she would have run one of her sharpest spears through your heart; but she allowed the gods and the ancestors to cross her over because she knew these times would come.

You speak to us about a strange god who has impregnated a young woman, a virgin, and she has given birth to a human child, a boy who also is a god who has come to save us? From what are we being saved? Have you gone out of your mind? Have you gone mad? The enemy has given you good clothing and a machine which takes you wherever he sends you. He has stolen your mind and your soul and has thrown them in the river of oblivion. You have no mind of your own; and you no longer have a soul. So the enemy uses your body for his service. You are the one who truly needs to be saved. You are the one who needs his own soul.

Yes, you are the one who needs his own Loma mind. He has robbed you of your true self. It is a wonder that he has not given you one of his Christian names and one of his daughters in marriage. In this way you will be of their culture and serve their god in their shrine.”

Again, there was laughter louder than before. This time it was difficult even for the chief to stop the people from laughing, for he was laughing the loudest. Uncle did not know what to do or say. Should he get up and walk away? No, for the people would have booed him and laughed even more. Furthermore, he would have been maltreated and foot cuffed for trying to destroy Loma culture. He knew he was in trouble and that he was alone.

In his heart, he began to blame Pastor Clifford for sending him to his own people. Perhaps another village among another tribe with different culture... that would have worked. These Loma people are too stuck in their ways. They are like horses taken to the river of clear waters but refuse to drink. I wish I would fly away from here. He thought these things in his heart.

The chief said, "The message you have delivered is only a beautiful fairy tale; good for the hearing of women and children by the fireside in the open kitchen. If you have no other story more interesting, than this, let us know for the day is far spent."

Uncle stood up and asked the people to pray with him. They asked him "what is the manner of Prayer?" Uncle Flumo was confused. He asked permission from the chiefs to leave. "Permission granted," the chiefs shouted in unison.

Chapter 23

A Two Minded Flumo

Uncle walked slowly towards the jeep with his head bowed. That jeep was his pride. Who could ever imagine a village Loma man having a car? A car of any kind. Be it a jeep or a pickup, it was a machine that could and would take him wherever he wanted to go. He also had his own personal driver. All was not lost, perhaps the children will come to Christ through his ministry. "I will ask the driver to teach me how to drive. On days that he is tired and needs to rest, I will drive. I will go to the villages nearby and win souls for Christ. I will go to other villages and drive souls home to Christ. This will be my job. This would be my Mission for Life."

My uncle patted himself on the back for these thoughts. It was necessary. His wife also will help him feel better. He smiled broadly at the thought of Komasa rubbing his back, gently with her soft slender fingers. Thinking of her has always brought joy to his heart. Her shapely body, her small waist, big hips and head full of beautiful black hair and a kind soft voice. Truly these are qualities any man wants from his woman. The gods have blessed him and deep in his heart Uncle Flumo knew the power of the gods. After all, he was a village Loma boy.

The gods, the thought of the gods, could not leave his mind. Even though he was now a Christian, he was first and foremost a Loma man. His blood was Loma, his thoughts were Loma mixed now with the thoughts and culture of the Intruder. He has become a two minded Flumo. These minds were pulling him in opposite directions. This pull in different directions would soon tear him apart. The thought of his walking naked in the streets of Zorzor full of madness drove fear into his very soul.

Uncle was hearing many strange sounds. Some were like the whistling of a man far away; others were varying voices, some of children, some of women and some of men. Many times in his mind, he saw eyes staring at him but could not see the bodies that owned them. He heard the sounds of roaring lions and lastly he saw Mama Luopu aiming at him with her spear. “Mother! Mother!” he shouted.

Komasa was awakened by his shouts. “Flumo, Flumo, Who are you talking to?” she shouted. He realized he has been dreaming. Many lessons come through dreams. The voices, the roaring of lions, his Grandmother's Spirit aiming her spear at him with disgust and terror. Are the gods angry?

Uncle looked down at his wife who was now sleeping next to him. “She looks so peaceful,” he thought. “I have to see a priest, a Zoe, one of my own people who knows the ways of the gods – and speaks their language. I must look into these dreams.”

Chapter 24

Old Man Zuba

Old man Zuba lived alone in the heart of the forest ten miles away from Barziwen, our village. He was one of those Zoes who never left the Forest after Initiation. He was the keeper of the Zoe Forest of our village. He rarely saw any other human bings. This new moon would be his fiftieth year living in the forest. Old Zuba was both human and spirit clothed in human flesh.

The story is told that during his birth, the midwife found a small spear clenched in his left hand. His hair was plaited in three braids with three cowries neatly tied at the end of each braid. Although they knew a keeper of the Zoe Forest comes after every fifty years, the gods had not revealed from which bloodline it would come, this time.

There are times when the gods keep silent about things to come – and only reveal them when they have happened. No one understands the ways of the gods. They keep silent on many requests even when sacrifices are made unto them. Their languages are many and strange to the human ear, perhaps that is why they are called the gods. They are the spirits who have come from Gaywologala . No one can see them, hear them, or know their thoughts. They reveal themselves to those they have made whole and ready for their mission. Was old man Zuba made whole and ready for the mission of the gods? Was he a lifetime friend and a doer of their will?

Uncle Flumo had often heard Grandmother and the other women talking about the keepers of the Zoe Forest. These men were born mysteriously, bringing with them the tools they would use in the human world. They remained in the Zoe Forest after Initiation and never lived in any human village. They ate only raw foods. Their diet was mainly fruit. Wild fruits of all kinds they knew. There are fruits for the healing of illnesses.

There are those for strength and endurance. There are fruits for the nourishment of the mind and brain. The keepers of the Zoe Forest knew all of them. They were the masters of the forest. They often wore the skins of animals or made their clothing from raffia and no razor ever touched their hair. They bathed in creeks and large rivers.

These keepers of the forest were looked upon with deep respect, almost fear. This is not the kind of fear that makes one to run away from an object dreadful to behold. It is the fear which comes with the awesomeness of a great one. A mystery is woven around his birth and the lonely life he lives in the forest; he was born to be a friend of the gods, the mouthpiece between humans and God; who's whole life was devoid of any human wants and pleasure, his only desire was to please the gods and be the keeper of the Zoe Forest.

Uncle was resolute in his decision to see the keeper of the Zoe Forest, but there were problems. What would Komasa think of his plan? Was the keeper of the Zoe Forest greater than God and the God Son?

Will not his God fulfill all his needs and solve all his problems? He has prayed sincerely for Komasa to become his wife and that God has given him the joy of his life. His God is able to do anything. This is the message he has preached to his wife. She did not only love him, but was deeply proud of him. A man whose love for his God was above all things and whose mind did not waiver in decisions taken: this was the man she wanted and needed in her life. He would be a true father figure for her children – a real man. He was not afraid of work and treated all with kindness and deep respect.

There was no doubt that she loved this man. The courage to drop his Loma traditions and to serve the only true God are qualities in him she will always admire. He has brought her to Christ. She became a Christian because of his deeds and preaching. He would not falter in his words nor flinch an inch from his salvation; he believed that Jesus was the way, the truth, and the life; this he had preached to her and many others.

The more he thought, the more there was to think about. My dear wife Komasa: what shall I tell her? Will she understand? Will she doubt me? Worst of all, might she go back to her parents? I must tell her my thoughts. I am her husband and we have become

one through marriage. We share our joys and we must share our problems. But I alone have created them and I alone must solve them. Why bring her into this madness?

Within himself, he cried “I wish to...I wish to...”

Chapter 25

Keeper of the Zoe Forest

"You wish to what?" His wife broke into his thoughts

"I want to visit the forest; walk under the big trees, smell the fresh wild fruits and behold the beauty of the greenery."

That is fine with me; but you will have to go alone, I'm afraid of the forest and her house; snakes, frogs, and the rest. Bring me some beautiful wildflowers," she said.

"What a wonderful woman she is! Come she has never given me any problems. This woman is God sent;" he sighed. "She is the best gift he has ever given to me."

It was very early that morning. The roosters had not broken the silence – to announce the coming of morn. Uncle has beaten them to the task. With a sharp cutlass and his left hand and a torch light in the other, a pair of black leather boots on his feet, uncle was ready for the journey. It was January and the harmattan wind savagely chilled him to the bones. Even though he wore a pair of blue jeans and a longsleeved thick sweater, he still felt the dry cold wind – as it beat upon his face. It was cold; but Uncle Flumo had a mission to fulfill. He must see the keeper of the Zoe Forest – before noon.

Walking fast, enjoying his walk.... when a dark object ran across his path. Uncle stood still waiting for the next foot to fall. Then another, and another, and another... they ran across his path with amazing speed. It was a long line of black four-legged creatures. Mongoose, those tasty fellows in palm butter soup. He remembered his boyhood days, when he and other boys cooked in the forest and ate their fill. Those were good days and care free. To be young and ignorant of life's dangers and sorrows make every youth happy.

The memories of such times also brought joy to him. He mused and kept walking, listening for any strange sounds. The daylight was approaching and he turned off the

torchlight and placed it in his back pocket. It must be about six o'clock. He pulled the torchlight out of his pocket, let it shine and looked down on the watch on his wrist. It was 6:15. He had been walking for two hours. Where is the Zoe of the Forest? How much farther do I have to go? Old Man Zuba knew that Uncle Flumo was on his way; for the gods had told him weeks ago.

Flumo felt that there can be no greater pain for a man than he who leaves his own culture and cleaves to a foreign one. He who is a stranger to himself will be used by those who know his values. He becomes a tool to those who need his services. Even though Uncle has become a Christian, he was Loma first. He must never forget his roots. A tree without roots soon dries up and dies. Of course Uncle knew these things, a few of the lessons taught in the schools of Loma Initiations. He also knew about the benefits he was gaining from the church; a new four-wheel-drive jeep, a monthly salary and a new four bedroom house. The village can never get him these things. Yes, things, indeed, they are just things. He thought about his wife as he pushed forward in the forest. He had come to the forest to seek advice from the Keeper of the Zoe Forest. He has now covered many miles but the Keeper, where is he?

In the distance that lay ahead Uncle saw a very dark field. His mind brought him many questions. He walked faster thinking of nothing but the dark field. "I do not need to wonder about this field; for I will soon see it;" he said to himself in whispering tones. As he walked on toward the field, it began to move in one direction. He stood by a very large tall tree looking at the moving field. Then he realized it was a river; one of the largest in Loma Land: the Lofa river. "How wonderful that you are moving steadily and ceaselessly in one direction, never weary and need no rest. O, blessed Lofa, in your silent wisdom show me which direction to take. Should I follow with you or go contrary to your flow? I must find the Keeper of the Zoe Forest. In your deep valley lie many many buried secrets; hidden from the mind of man. You are also the dwelling of many secrets. You are Times best friend. No one knows your beginning or end. Let now the gods in your silent valley speak to me. Let them tell me or show me where the Keeper of the Zoe Forest is. Is he a very old man? Does he still have vigor in his veins? Have his muscles given away to weakness because of the number of his years?"

As Uncle spoke these words, fear, deep fear fell upon him. He felt that someone nearby was watching him. Yes, he knew that someone was watching him; when a voice, deep and trembling, called him by his name. "Flumo, Son of Mama Luopu come closer. Be brave like your mother and father before they crossed over. They are here with you and no harm shall befall you in their presence and mine. My hands are outstretched to you. Look at the large cotton tree before you. I have pushed my right hand through it – and wish to shake your hand." A miracle has taken place. Fear left him and as the voice had said the arm was sticking out of the large cotton tree. Uncle saw it clearly. The voice commanded. "Touch the hand and be transformed – to your nature's given state."

Epilogue

One cannot describe war without the image of blood and bloodshed: the chopped up limbs lying in the battlefield, while the victims in pain cry with deep sorrow and total despair; the women and girls being raped and civilians being forced to watch “the fun.” I call it fun for the soldiers think it's so. Our sisters being raped, our mothers too; in hopelessness they cry and we are unable to help them. They roll in pain and lasting shame. But the shame is ours; the regret is ours forever for in our minds, we see our sisters and our mothers being raped. Our hands are tied and the presence of soldiers with their guns breeds fear in us. We are glued to our positions while the guns aim at us. Fear is the only monster that eats up the brave and spits them out. I was a coward. The death of many was brought upon them by fear; but why fear that which we cannot escape? That must come.

Oh, how precious it is to die in the defense of our loved ones! How wonderful it is to lie in blood after freeing the sister, that brother, that mother, who was about to be raped and brutally murdered by brutes and murderous thugs! The war has raged on fourteen years. The blood of children, men, women and soldiers has been spilled on Mother Earth. She now cries out saying, “I have had enough of the blood of the innocent. I have had my fill of your madness and repressed cruelty. I am frail.”

The blood of millions now cries out and for Mother Earth cannot wipe all the tears. War forever changes the status of humans and turns them into brutes, savages and monsters. Even children born into war and those children who experienced war are no longer learn the meaning of human dignity or self-respect. Sex becomes a common act labeled "fun." Children are no longer the beloved of their parents and love only a song of passers by. What has become of humans beings? What has become of us all? We have thrown Nature out of order, therefore lawlessness has taken rulership of the world. Where is the brotherly love? We slaughter one another like animals for the market. We brutally murder our wives in the name of tribalism. We preach peace but practice vice and

division. War has bred fatherless children; motherless children too. Where is the brotherly love? Cultures have been torn into pieces and thrown into the rivers of oblivion. Where is the brotherly love? We have become like animals being led to the slaughter; and the butchers are our sons and daughters, soldiers ready for war. Where is the brotherly love? The world is wrapped up in blankets of confusion and evil. Where is the brotherly love?

The wicked and degenerate minds that created weapons only for the destruction of human lives and property surely and truly have no brotherly love. So where is the brother love, Liberia? When will we stop and practice war no more? Humanity is a word whose blessed values we valued highly, but no more. Where is God in all of this havoc, confusion and hatred? Man against his brother, daughters against mothers; the people lust after material things lust after human blood; where is the brotherly love? Where is this loving Creator, whose sun shines on both the evil and the good? With all our pleas the loving God did not listen to our fervent prayers. They must have fallen on dead ears. How can the God answer that which the God does not hear? For while we prayed in the churches, our brothers, our sisters, our daughters, our fathers or mothers and our children dropped dead. Losing blood from their open wounds still tell the story of how Liberia died and I could no longer live. I died with her.

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John Koluba