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Juvenile Fiction

A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk
Jan L. Coates
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The orphaned "Lost Boys of Sudan," the most likely to survive of the two million people displaced during the late 1980s and early 1990s, seek refuge in Ethiopia and Kenya. In *A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk*, author Jan L. Coates takes the experiences of one real-life survivor, Jacob Deng, and creates a vivid and detailed story.

Young Jacob plays peacefully in his Sudanese village. He makes clay figures, gives his little sister rides on his back, and watches his beautiful mama wash clothes at the river and grind millet for supper porridge. Singing and storytelling are a large part of their lives. They sing special songs to go to sleep, to soothe the cows, or to urge a baby to come.

Then war intrudes. Jacob's uncle explains it this way: "The government in the north wants to get rid of all the black Africans in Southern Sudan, or have us do their work." The southern Sudan's oil and fertile land are also desirable assets. When Jacob is seven years old, soldiers attack his village, and he must flee.

Jacob's big feet have earned him his nickname, "the Hare." Like the fabled small hare who outsmarts an elephant, he wishes he could overcome the elephant-soldiers who ride in to the village shooting and stabbing, while tanks crush and helicopters drop fire on the people's huts. Amid explosions and the screams of people and animals, Jacob runs into the forest. He never sees his beloved mother again. Her encouragement, however, stays with him: *Wadeng*, or hope for tomorrow, and her advice: "An education will give you the tools to carve a better future for our people."

As a refugee, Jacob is tempted to fight to save his land by joining the Sudan People's Liberation Army. At heart, however, he would rather write down the stories of his heritage. He becomes a translator for aid workers in the refugee camps where he stays. Education becomes his focus.

Young readers will find admirable qualities in Jacob, as he perseveres through months of

thirst, hunger, bloody wounds wrapped in leaves, walking many miles from grasslands through blistering sand, and escaping ravenous crocodiles while crossing rivers to reach safety. The author includes interviews and a glossary that further explain how the story came to be written. This book puts into perspective the peace and educational opportunities that readers enjoy. Proceeds from the novel will be shared with Jacob's foundation for children's learning, *Wadeng* Wings of Hope.

Mary Popham