

Gisma's Sister Gets Married



Written by Mumbi Kaigwa & Keith Pearson
Illustrated by Patrick Kirby

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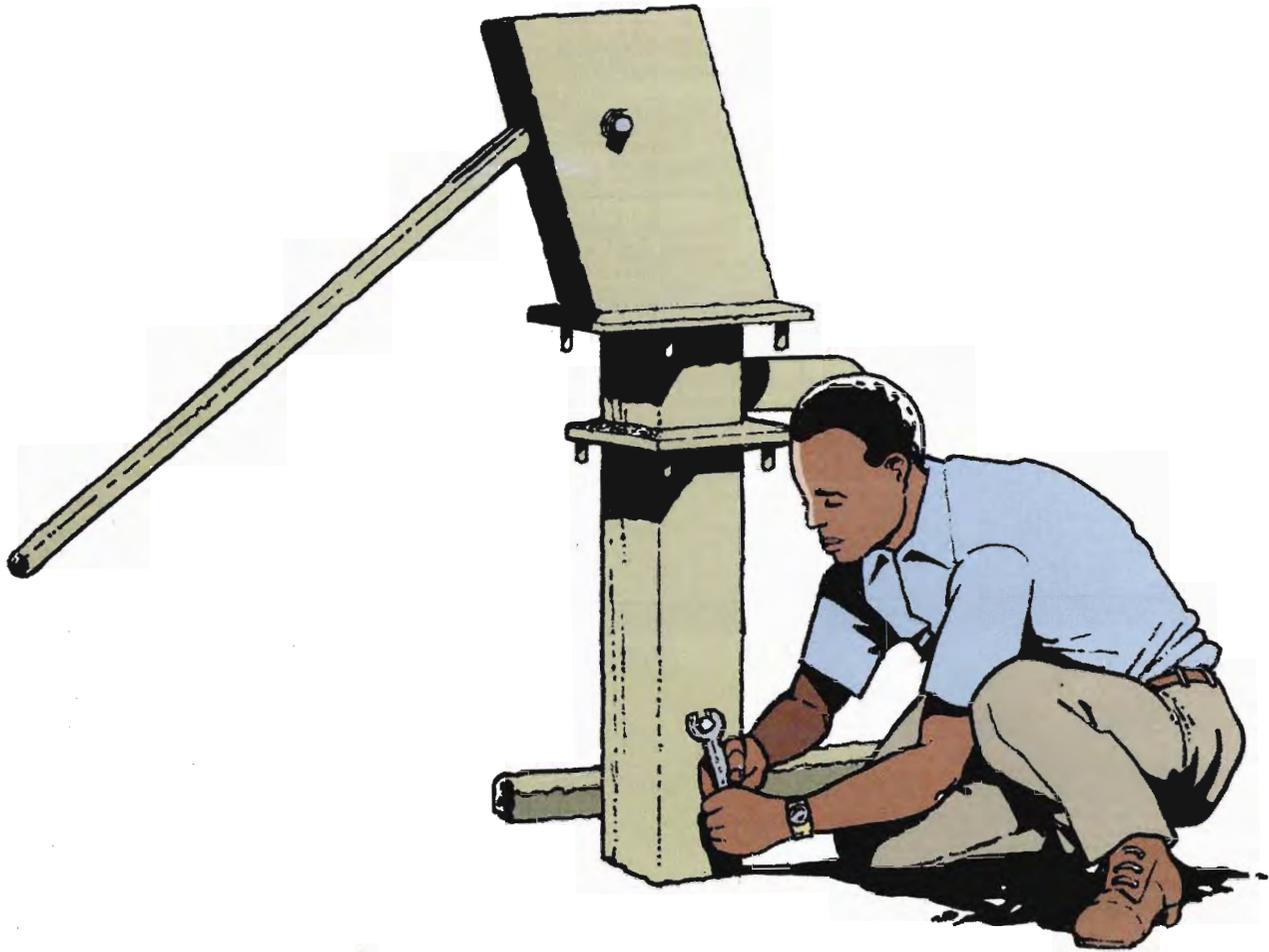
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GISMA'S SISTER GETS MARRIED

“Gisma, can I tell you a secret? Charles has asked me to leave school and marry him. His mother is getting old and she needs someone to help with all the housework.”

This is how my sister, Joyce, announced her marriage plans. We were walking home on a hot afternoon. It was the last day of school before the long holiday began.

My family has known Charles for three years. Joyce met him when he arrived in our village from a camp in Uganda. He works as an engineer, building boreholes and latrines. Charles's father died during the war. Charles is the oldest son so he is often busy helping his mother, doing the jobs his father would have done.

“What did you tell him?” I asked. Joyce gave a hesitant reply. “Charles is a kind man and I love him. But I also want to finish my education. I've told him that I'll marry only if I can stay in school.”

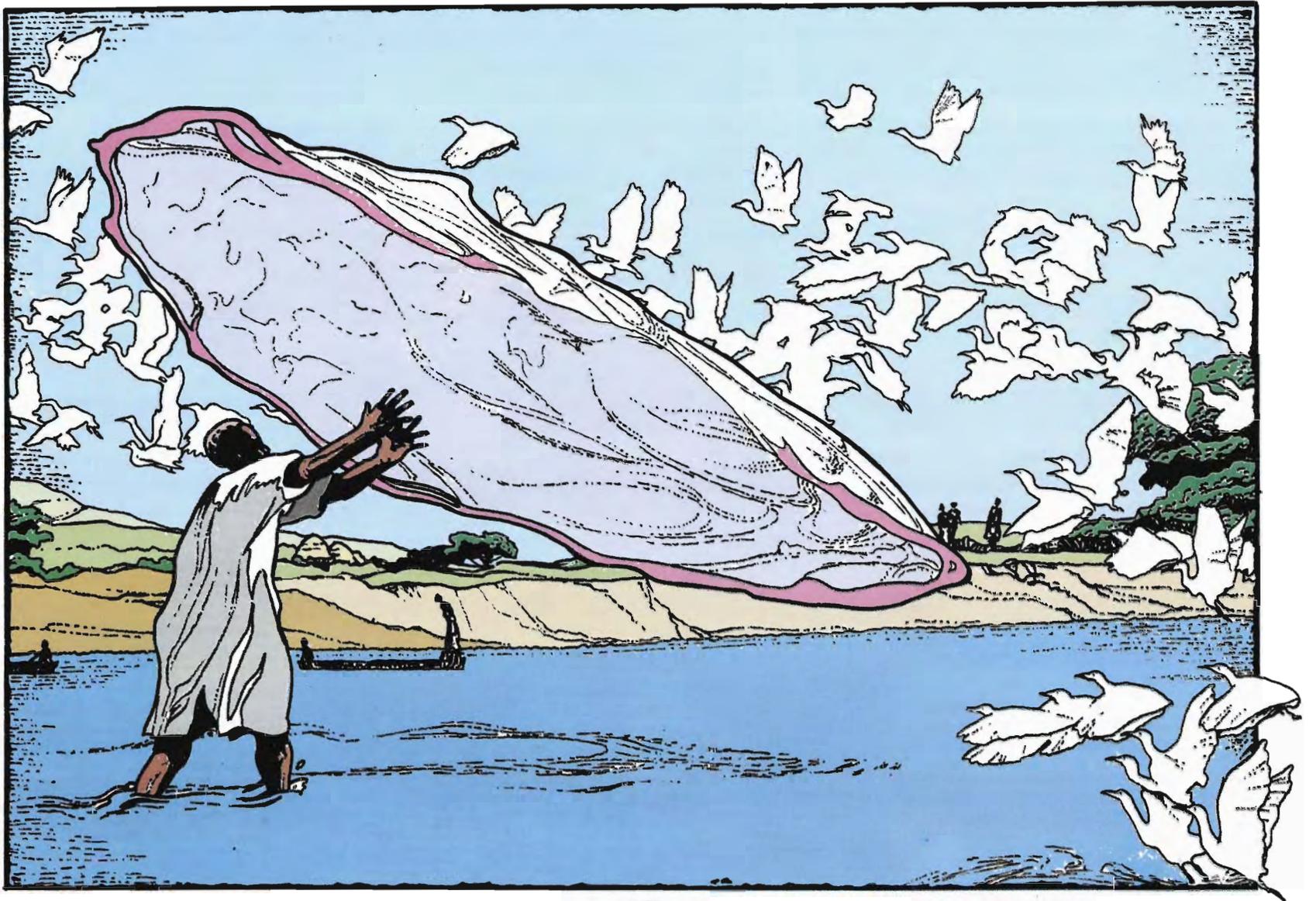
The next morning Joyce and I woke early. We had to rush to the ferry where we were meeting two of my best friends Ayoo and Roda.

Today we're going to visit Roda's Aunt Lio who lives on the other side of the Nile River. I think Aunt Lio is one of the bravest people I have ever met. A few years ago she stepped on a land mine while searching for firewood in the forest. She lost her foot and the lower part of her leg. From that time on she had to walk using a stick propped under her arm. For many months it was difficult for Aunt Lio but instead of feeling sad or relying on others, she worked just as hard, if not harder.

Each month I cross the river with Roda, Aker and Ayoo to visit Aunt Lio. Aunt Lio is a good friend to us. While we help in the garden and do other chores, Aunt Lio gives us advice and tells us stories about life before the war.

Aker cannot join us today. She has to look after her brother who is sick with malaria so my sister Joyce has agreed to come instead.





We arrive at the dock to find Roda and Ayoo already standing together with bundles of firewood at their feet.

As we wait for the small boat to fill with passengers, we watch men fishing in the river. A flock of birds circle noisily in the air as fishing nets curl like waves through the sky.

We settle in the boat, shielding our eyes from the sunlight reflecting on the water. I nudge Joyce, wanting her to share the news of her marriage proposal. Roda is excited to learn there might be a wedding.

Ayoo is worried and insists that Joyce should not marry until she finishes secondary school.

“It’s not fair,” remarks Ayoo. “Parents receive a dowry when their daughters marry, and sometimes they use the money to pay school fees for their sons.”



We relax in the boat telling stories and discussing our plans for the future. Roda talked about her hope that she might be a nurse one day. I trail my hands in the river's cool water and begin to sing a song taught to me by a Shilluk friend,

“Uwar de gwang oom yerp dwarager,
Jwana kert,
Wana reng mir nyika dwarager.”

The roof of the king's house has been blown off.
Come let us rebuild it before he returns.
If the roof is not repaired,
He will come and punish us.

By now we had travelled quite a distance. I could see people on the opposite bank of the river, bathing and fetching water.

A small boy was tying bundles of leaves together like small boats which he then set adrift down the river. Our boatman called out in greeting to boatmen that passed us on the river.

The time passed quickly and before long we had reached our destination. As the other passengers hurried off the boat, we arranged our firewood and the containers that we would use to bring water to Aunt Lio's house.

We were expecting Aunt Lio's neighbour to meet us, but no one had come for us. As we stood waiting near the dock, we noticed a group of young girls playing a game with several stones.

We all watched with great curiosity and soon they invited us to join their game called Duwlo. The game involves digging a hole in the ground and using a playing stone plus twelve other stones. The player must throw the playing stone up and then try to push each of the twelve stones, one by one, into the hole.

In return, we taught them one of the games that we play in our village, the seven-stone game. In this game a girl must try to build a wall of seven stones while two other players try to hit her with a ball. It's not easy to build a wall and avoid being hit by a ball.

How we laughed when Roda threw the ball so hard that it landed in the river. Scared there might be crocodiles, Roda refused to retrieve the ball so Ayoo waded into the water enjoying a brief cool swim.

It was too hot to play for very long, so we sat in the shelter of a nearby shop.





“Ayoo, Gisma, Roda,” came the sound of a voice from along the dusty road.

Imagine our surprise when we looked up and saw Aunt Lio running towards us. Yes! She was running! We rushed to meet her. We were anxious to ask how she could be running, but paused to exchange customary greetings first.

Aunt Lio started to laugh as she beckoned us to sit with her in the shade of the shop. “I see you are amazed that I can run,” she observed. “I also thought I would never run again until some technicians came from India to assist victims of landmines. Look, they gave me this special leg called a Jaipur Foot.”

Aunt Lio lifted her skirt and proudly showed us the rubber foot that had been fitted to her leg. Well, it did not match her skin exactly but it certainly looked like a foot!

“What a miracle!” she cried. “Now I can work in the fields, walk to the river and even dance a little bit!”

“I’m sorry I kept you waiting. I wanted you to see how far I could walk.”

We picked up our firewood and containers and began walking to Aunt Lio’s house, still amazed at how quickly she could move her feet.

“Now you must all tell me your news,” said Aunt Lio. “It’s a month since I last saw you.” I was the first to respond. “Charles wants to marry Joyce, my sister, but Joyce wants to finish school. She’s not sure what to do.” Joyce cast her eyes downward, feeling embarrassed.

“Let’s go inside out of the sun, and we can talk further,” replied Aunt Lio, ushering us through the doorway.

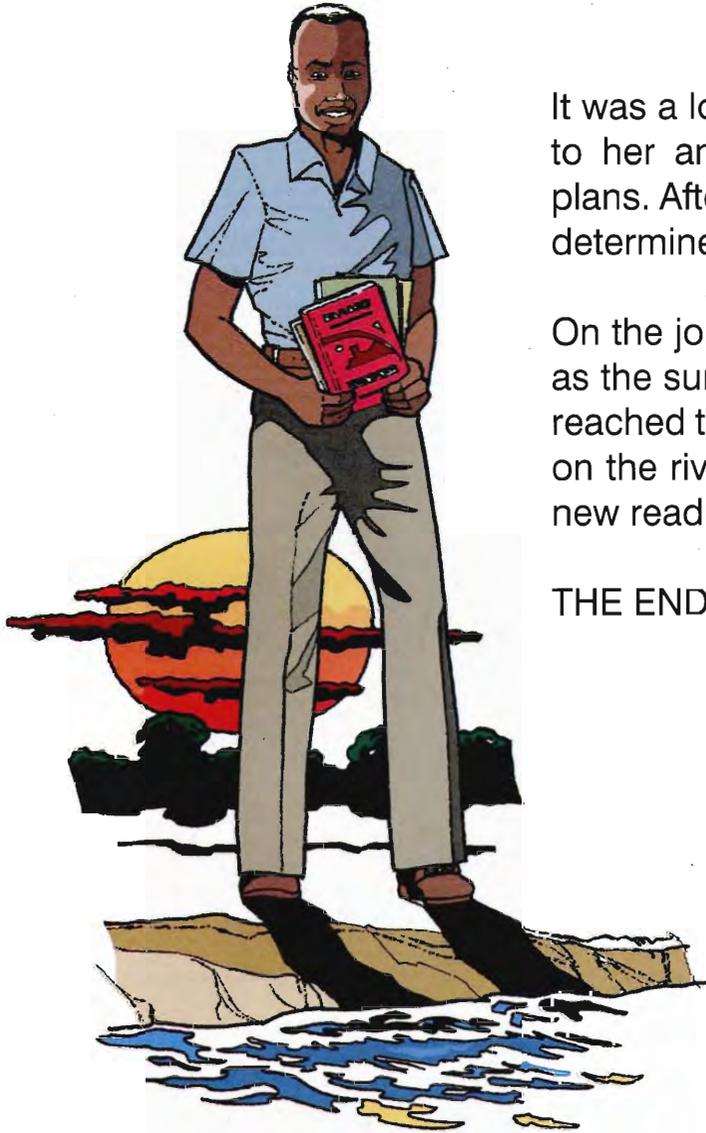
She showed us to some new stools that had been woven by her neighbour and offered us some cool water from the pot in the corner. She pulled at some sorghum stalks.

“Some people believe it is a waste of time to send a girl to school. Have you heard the traditional saying, *educating a girl is like feeding a bird that will fly from this tree to another tree. Why do something that will benefit another family?*”

“I may be old, but I don’t agree with that old saying,” said Aunt Lio. “I think all boys and girls need to complete their schooling. I think everyone benefits when both boys and girls are educated. Does education make a girl’s cooking worse or make her less able to grow sorghum?”

Aunt Lio turned to Joyce and spoke quietly. “Don’t give up your dream Joyce. You are still young and you have choices. You can choose to complete school first and marry later. Or you can choose to marry Charles and still continue with your education. Whatever you decide, please promise me that you will finish school.”





It was a long and busy day. We planted Aunt Lio's garden, tended to her animals, fetched water, and talked about Roda's career plans. After setting eyes upon Aunt Lio's Jaipur Foot, she was more determined than ever to become a nurse.

On the journey home we watched the changing colours in the sky as the sun began its descent over the banks of the river. When we reached the other side, there was Charles standing beside papyrus on the river bank. He smiled at Joyce, holding in his hands some new reading books as presents.

THE END

ENRICH YOUR VOCABULARY

Here is a list of selected words that appear in the story. Look carefully at the words. Use a dictionary to find out their exact meanings, learn how to spell them and then practise using them in different sentences.

traditional

hesitant

anxious

opposite

waded

enjoying

destination

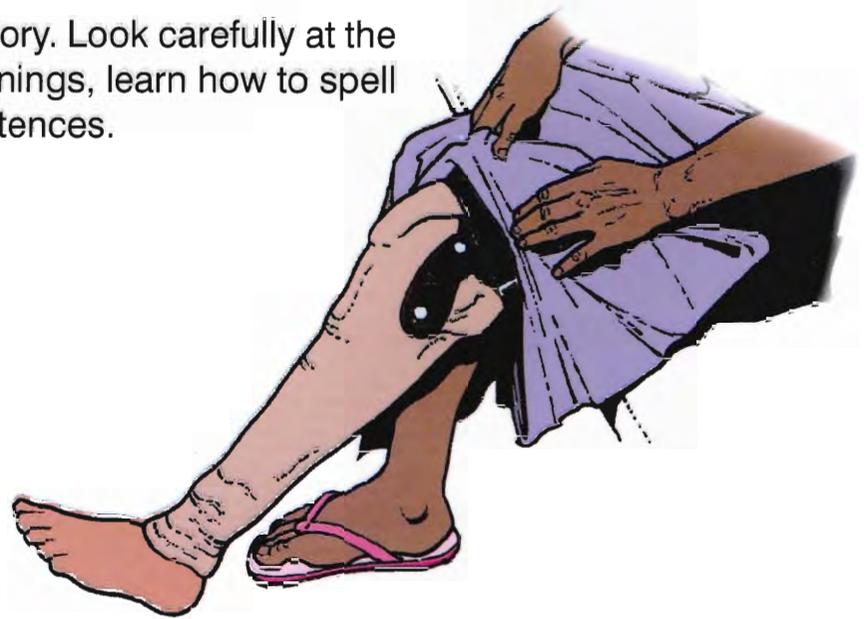
repaired

adrift

embarrassed

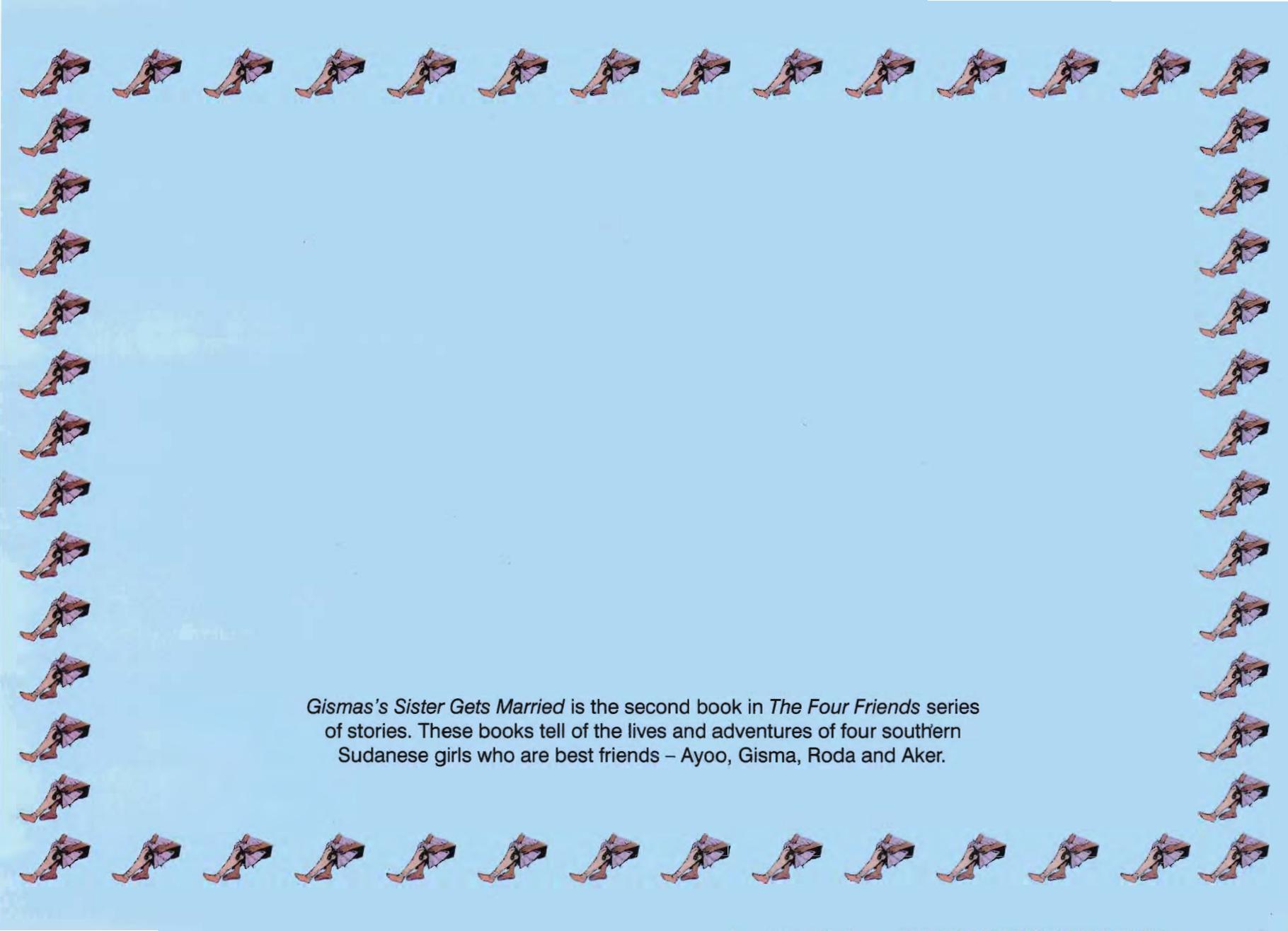
shielding

remarks



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1) Ayoo believes a girl should finish her education before marriage. What do you think?
- 2) Aunt Lio says that girls and boys should both receive an education. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
- 3) In your community, do boys and girls have the same opportunity to attend and finish school?
- 4) Do you know any girls in your community who have dropped out of school to get married? What advice would you give to them?



Gisma's Sister Gets Married is the second book in *The Four Friends* series of stories. These books tell of the lives and adventures of four southern Sudanese girls who are best friends – Ayoo, Gisma, Roda and Aker.