

The Bite of the Mango by Mariatu Kamara with Susan McClelland

My name is Mariatu. I am 11 years old. I live with my father's sister Marie and her husband Alie. I have been with them since I was a baby. In my country Sierra Leone it is very common for children in small rural areas to be raised by relatives other than their birth parents. I live in a peaceful village of 200 people. In our village there were only 8 houses made of clay and wood with tin roofs. Several families live in each house. The adults sleep in smaller rooms, and all of us children all sleep together in the living room. Everyone helps each other. The women cook together, the men work together, and all the children play together. We were too poor to go to school, and all the children were expected to help with the farm work. I would have loved to have gone to school, but I was happy playing with my cousins, and helping out my family. I had a huge crush on a boy named Musa. One day Musa took my hand and told me that when we were older we would get married. I was so happy I could hardly speak. I was crushed when I was told that Musa's father was a rich man and would never let his son marry a poor girl like me. I cried and cried that night. I hoped that somehow Musa could change his father's mind.

When I was 11, war came to my country. We heard the rumors about the violent rebels destroying villages and killing people. They wanted to overthrow the government. I could not understand why they would want to kill innocent people. We listened for the rebels every night. If the lookouts thought they were coming, they would warn us and we would hide in the bush for several days. One day when we were in hiding I was told to go with my cousins to fetch food from a storage bin in our village. I was afraid and did not want to go, but was told that there would be 10 of us, and we would have safety in numbers. That did not turn out to be true. The rebels found us.

Read Page 31- "Then everything began to happen too fast to

Page 32 – an inferno."

I had been told that when the rebels kill they make the person watching say they enjoyed it. If you wanted to live, you had to tell the rebels you liked what you saw to stay alive. To this day I wonder if I made the right choice. "Do you like what you have seen?" a young rebel asked me. "Yes I answered." If I would have known what would happen to me next, I am not sure that would have been my answer. To this day it is still hard for me to tell you what the rebels did to me. It would change my life forever. To find out the horrific things that happen to me, and how my experience led me to a life in Canada you have to read my biography – [The Bite of the Mango](#).

This is a true story about a very courageous girl. Today Mariatu is a college student in Toronto. She is a UNICEF special representative for Children and Armed Conflict. She tours North American speaking about her experiences.

Please note – This book has violent content and SLJ recommends it for grades 9 and up.