

B' Λυκείου

Unit 2 – Mesfin's story

Kakuma is found in Turkana district which is situated in the north-western part of Kenya, bordering Ethiopia, Uganda and the Sudan. The area where the refugee camp is located is dry, dusty and sunny. Sometimes you feel the heat as if the sun is only kilometers away. The air is full of dust particles. At the far end of the refugee camp stands a lone plastic make-shift hut, as if it has no care for what exists in the world. The owner is also lonely; he lives by himself in an alien land. The shabby shelter is neither a house nor a pen. But it partially protects its owner from the sun and the big grains of sand and it is the only worldly thing which relates Mesfin with property. He says "It is my house", but deep inside he knows that he does not deserve it.

When Mesfin feels the stress from the combined forces of loneliness, lack of love and hunger he usually loiters in the forest. Moreover, when there is a shortage of firewood, which is more often than not, he walks for about twenty kilometers to fetch twigs. The wood is essential to provide the energy required to boil the beans which are hard to cook. The firewood rationed is hardly enough to make a day's meals, so fetching wood is one of Mesfin's main activities.

Buying charcoal is out of the question since money is hard to come across; collecting from around the camp is illegal and it would invite confrontation with the uncompromising local Turkana people. But having a piece of wood is the difference between eating and going without food. So, to cook and eat a decent meal, he has to rise with the sun and go in search of firewood.

Once he almost lost his life because of a bundle of firewood. Shame. On this occasion he walked very far from the camp. He collected fallen trees and branches, tied the pieces together with the rope he had carried with him and started his journey back to the camp. He braved the scorching sun from above and the burning heat of the sand under his feet. He took strength from the hope that he would reach home safely with his bundle, to cook and to eat his fill.

After travelling much of the distance back to the camp, sweating and panting under the load of the bundle, the unexpected happened. Unfortunately, he met an aggressive local Turkana armed with knives and arrows and was asked to throw the bundle he was carrying down. Poor chap! He tried to reason with the Turkana forgetting that neither of them could understand the other. He tried to win his heart by showing submissiveness and bowing repeatedly, but in vain. He even tried to cry to evoke sympathy, but to no avail. The local was determined and uncompromising. He threatened Mesfin with his armaments and indicated the place where Mesfin should place the bundle of wood. Finally, when Mesfin understood his position and when he knew that he was beaten, he abandoned the bundle and restarted the interrupted journey back home. He doesn't know how he covered the remaining distance, since he finished it moving as a corpse, cursing the star under which he had been born.

Back at home he lay on his mat. He forgot that he had eaten nothing the whole day and that his stomach was empty. He crouched with his head and knees together as a hungry dog and cried for peace. He wondered if it was proper to cry at the age of 40 or so, but it was the only way to keep his sanity; all he could do to keep himself from self-destruction. When he sits and

ponders what he is doing with his life or what is being done to him, Mesfin always ends up confused. He first fled his home country to the Sudan when the Marxist junta – which had stood for the down-trodden – won state power and started to eliminate the so-called reactionaries. He returned to Ethiopia when President Mengistu took his turn to flee the country and to join the refugees in Harare, and then the new Ethiopian Transitional Government came to power. He returned and stayed in the country long enough to see how fast Ethiopians were going "from the frying pan into the fire". Then he took off again, this time to Kenya. Born to run away as a rabbit at the first sight of a problem, he thought to himself silently.

He learned nothing from his running, but his long life as a refugee taught him tolerance. He knows that tolerance is the rule of the game and it is the way to sanity. That is why he is still alive. He remembered how many of his friends perished and how many went mad and disappeared into the desert, left to unknown fates. Once while wandering around somewhere, he had found an identity card, an Ethiopian one, near a partially decomposed body. He tried to see the face of the deceased but his legs failed him. He fell to the ground and vomited. When he had composed himself, he ran to the camp and hid in his hut for days.

He hated remembering, sitting on his mat, counting the days that he had lived in the refugee camp, enduring the unendurable. But here he was, sitting and remembering. He tolerated the police who behave as if they own the world, and demand so much when they see a refugee. He tolerated the workers of the humanitarian organisations who think that they know the needs of the refugees. And he also tolerated the hunger, the thirst, the cold and the sun which are intolerable.

As he sat, he prayed for his deliverance. But he knows God is unfair in his treatment of individuals. The illogical God allows some creatures to wither away in a hot desert, in an alien land, while others are leading luxurious lives. Today, he doubts fairness.

Finally, he was tired and went to sleep, to wait for another tomorrow. In a refugee's life, all tomorrows are the same. No story to tell, no history to write and no future to plan. Tomorrow is just another miserable day.

Unit 2 – Mesfin’s Story: Life in Kakuma Refugee Camp

Mesfin lives in a makeshift hut at the edge of Kakuma refugee camp, located in the harsh, dry region of north-western Kenya. The camp is dusty and scorching, making life difficult for its inhabitants. Mesfin’s only possession is his fragile shelter, which offers him minimal protection from the sun and sand. His daily life is filled with challenges, such as collecting firewood for cooking, often walking long distances under dangerous conditions. Interactions with the local Turkana people can be tense, and resources like money and charcoal are scarce. Despite facing hunger, loneliness, and danger, Mesfin must endure and adapt to survive. His experiences as a refugee have taught him tolerance, even as he struggles with memories of loss, unfairness, and the uncertainty of life in exile.

Fill in the Blank: Fill in the blank with the correct words.

1. Mesfin lives alone in a _____ plastic hut at the edge of the refugee camp.
2. He usually walks about _____ kilometers to collect firewood.
3. Buying _____ is not possible for Mesfin because he does not have enough money.
4. The local _____ people sometimes confront refugees like Mesfin when they collect firewood.
5. Mesfin believes that _____ is the rule of survival in the refugee camp.

Word Bank:

Turkana tolerance makeshift twenty charcoal

Multiple Choice Questions: Choose the correct answer from the choices for each question.

1. Where is Kakuma refugee camp located?
 - A) Southern Ethiopia
 - B) North-western Kenya
 - C) Eastern Sudan
 - D) Central Uganda
2. What does Mesfin do when he feels stressed and lonely?
 - A) Visits friends in the camp
 - B) Reads books in his hut
 - C) Walks in the forest
 - D) Travels to the city

3. Why is collecting firewood dangerous for Mesfin?
 - A) He might get lost
 - B) Food is scarce
 - C) He could face threats from local people
 - D) It is illegal to eat beans
4. What does Mesfin say helps him stay sane despite his struggles?
 - A) Wealth
 - B) Tolerance
 - C) Power
 - D) Anger
5. How does Mesfin describe his future as a refugee?
 - A) Full of hope and opportunity
 - B) Confusing but exciting
 - C) Miserable and uncertain
 - D) Safe and predictable

Open-Ended Questions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. Describe one of the main challenges Mesfin faces each day in the refugee camp.
2. How does Mesfin react when confronted by the Turkana man in the story? What does this reveal about his situation?
3. In what ways has Mesfin's life as a refugee changed his perspective or character? Explain with examples from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Fill in the Blank Answers

1. makeshift
2. twenty
3. charcoal
4. Turkana
5. tolerance

Multiple Choice Answers

1. B) North-western Kenya
2. C) Walks in the forest
3. C) He could face threats from local people
4. B) Tolerance
5. C) Miserable and uncertain

Open-Ended Example Responses

1. One main challenge Mesfin faces is finding enough firewood to cook his food, which often requires him to walk long distances and risk confrontations with the local people.
2. When confronted by the Turkana man, Mesfin tries to reason, show submission, and even cries, but ultimately is forced to leave the firewood behind. This reveals his vulnerability and the dangers refugees face.
3. Mesfin's life as a refugee has taught him the importance of tolerance and endurance. He has learned to survive despite suffering, loss, and constant uncertainty, which has changed how he views life and survival.

 **Gap-fill Exercise: “Life in Kakuma” (Authentic Text Version – B2+/C1)**

Fill in the blanks with ONE word from the original text.
(There are 25 gaps. All missing words or their base forms appear in the story *Kakuma*.)

Kakuma lies in the dry and (1) d_____ land of north-western Kenya, where the air is full of dust and the heat feels unbearable. There, in the middle of the refugee camp, stands a lonely (2) h_____, made of plastic sheets and sticks — a (3) m_____ shelter that barely protects its owner, Mesfin, from the burning sun and wind.

Mesfin spends most of his days struggling with (4) l_____, hunger, and despair. To cook his beans, he must search for (5) f_____, walking nearly twenty kilometers under the scorching sun. Collecting wood is dangerous; it can lead to (6) c_____ with the local Turkana people, who are (7) u_____ and often armed. Still, without firewood, there is no meal.

One day, Mesfin almost lost his (8) l_____ because of a simple bundle of wood. Exhausted and sweating, he was stopped by a Turkana man with knives and arrows who ordered him to drop his load. Mesfin tried to reason, bow, and even (9) c_____, but it was useless. Finally, (10) h_____ and beaten, he abandoned the bundle and returned to his tent like a dead man, (11) c_____ the star under which he was born.

Lying on his mat, he forgot his hunger and began to (12) r_____ on his long journey as a refugee — from Ethiopia to Sudan and back again, until he finally reached Kenya. His years of (13) s_____ had taught him tolerance; he had learned to bear what is (14) u_____.

He endured the police who acted as if they owned the world, and the aid workers who believed they knew everything about refugees’ needs. He endured the hunger, thirst, cold, and burning sun. Yet he doubted whether God was (15) f_____, for some live in comfort while others, like him, are left to (16) w_____ away in the desert.

As night fell, Mesfin lay down to sleep, waiting for another (17) t_____, knowing that in a refugee’s life, all tomorrows are the same — no story to tell, no (18) h_____ to write, no future to plan.

 **Word Bank (optional – for weaker B2 students)**

dusty | hut | makeshift | loneliness | firewood | confrontation | uncompromising | life | cry
| humiliated | cursing | reflect | suffering | unendurable | fair | wither | tomorrow | history

 **Answer Key (for teacher reference)**

1. dusty
2. hut
3. makeshift
4. loneliness
5. firewood
6. confrontation
7. uncompromising
8. life
9. cry
10. humiliated
11. cursing
12. reflect
13. suffering
14. unendurable
15. fair
16. wither
17. tomorrow
18. history

 **Gap-fill Exercise: “Life in Kakuma” (B2+/C1)**

Fill in the gaps with **ONE** suitable word.

(The first letter of each missing word is given to help you. There are 25 gaps in total.)

Kakuma lies in the remote, arid region of north-western Kenya, a place where the air is thick with dust and the sun seems only a few kilometers away. In this desolate land stands Mesfin’s **(1) m**_____ plastic hut — the only thing he can call his own. Though it offers little protection from the blistering heat, it is a fragile **(2) s**_____ between him and the harsh world outside.

When loneliness and hunger become unbearable, Mesfin wanders through the forest searching for firewood, a **(3) s**_____ task but vital for cooking the beans that keep him alive. Buying charcoal is impossible, and collecting wood is forbidden by the local Turkana people, whose **(4) h**_____ often turns violent. Still, every day he rises with the sun, determined to find enough twigs to make a meal.

One day, his routine nearly **(5) c**_____ his life. While carrying a heavy bundle of wood back to the camp, he was stopped by an armed Turkana man who ordered him to drop it. Mesfin tried to **(6) p**_____ with him, showing respect and submission, but the man remained **(7) u**_____. Defeated and humiliated, Mesfin abandoned the bundle and walked home like a corpse, **(8) c**_____ the cruel fate that had followed him all his life.

Lying on his mat, too weak to eat, he reflected on his endless **(9) e**_____ from one country to another — from Ethiopia to Sudan, back again, then on to Kenya — always fleeing oppression and war. His life as a refugee had taught him one essential lesson: **(10) t**_____. Without it, he would have gone mad, as so many others had.

He tolerated the police who **(11) e**_____ the refugees, the aid workers who claimed to know their needs, and the relentless hunger and heat. Yet deep inside, he questioned the **(12) f**_____ of a God who allowed some to live in comfort while others suffered endlessly.

In the end, exhaustion overcame him, and he fell asleep, waiting for another tomorrow — a tomorrow that, for refugees like Mesfin, always looks **(13) i**_____ from the day before: empty, hopeless, and painfully the same.

 **Word Bank (for teacher use / optional prompts)**

(Use only if you want to scaffold for lower C1 students.)

- miserable, shelter, meaningless, endless, encounter, harshness, inevitable, compromise, pleaded, questioned, unfriendly, consistency, tolerance, cost, fairness, curse, exhausted, exploitation.
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 **Answer Key (for teacher reference)**

1. makeshift
2. shelter
3. simple / small (or “menial”)
4. hostility
5. cost
6. plead
7. uncompromising
8. cursing
9. escapes
10. tolerance
11. exploit
12. fairness
13. identical