

Ghana

Forgotten: Esther's Story

The sun is not yet settled in the sky when Esther lifts her small body from the sleeping mat. Esther is the youngest *Trokosi* at the shrine and it is her job to walk two miles to fetch water for the priests and other *Trokosi*. There is no breakfast when she returns to the shrine, arms aching, skin dry and cracked from the rising sun.

Esther's family used to bring food to her when she first came to the shrine but now she seems to fade from their memory like a daughter dead or in disgrace. Their struggle to feed the children at home leaves them little time or money to think of a daughter who lives at the holy shrine. Furthermore, Esther's family would rather stay out of the sight of these priests, in case their presence reminds the fetish priest of any more family offenses. It is best to worship the gods from afar, where one's remaining daughters are safe and free and so the food and clothing, which the family is supposed to provide for Esther, no longer arrive.



Esther sees her own mother hurry past on the path and she pauses in her sweeping. Not even a slight lifting of the eyes indicates that the mother recognizes the girl holding the broom. Maybe her mother doesn't want to see that Esther is naked except for a ratty cloth knotted around her waist. Maybe she doesn't want to see the ribs protruding from hunger. Maybe she doesn't want to see Esther's belly just beginning to swell with a child.

Esther follows the other *Trokosi* women out to the fields. She must help produce a crop for the priest, her master, the town's holy man, who began demanding sex from her four months ago, after her first menstruation. It is no use to look to the other women for help – they take their own turns and are just as helpless. Many have their own pregnant bellies. She imagines eating the corn kernels she plants but she knows that she would be beaten. Today is the second day she has gone without food. She no longer feels panic but a dull, empty, ache beginning in her belly and moving up to her heart. She looks forward to the day when she won't have to feel anything at all.



Esther notices the sun on its downward journey. How does the sun get there? Who orders it to rise and fall? If she could, would she ask it to stay up in the sky for her to work in the fields? Or would she ask it to stay below the earth for her to sleep and dread when the priest comes to carry out his night-time ritual?

please see side 2 of Esther's Story

She could run away but where would she run? They would find her, beat her and return her to slavery at the holy shrine. Esther is a female in the Volta region of Ghana. Years ago her grandfather committed a small offense. Recently, there was a series of family misfortunes and the village priest demanded a young virgin daughter to appease the gods for this past offense and stop the misfortunes. Esther is the young daughter and she is punished; her life path stretches into the distance: no food, no relief, no joy. She is a *Trokosi*, a slave to the gods. She is isolated in her shrine and doesn't know that *Trokosi* just like her in other shrines are being freed to live new lives of purpose and joy. She doesn't know that there is a bend in her path. But she soon will.

Trokosi Freedom

Because of the prayers and financial gifts of strangers on a continent across the world, Esther will have a new life full of something most of us take for granted – choice. Choice about the God she will worship. Choice about what to eat and how to provide for her children. Choice to be the woman God created.



I.N. Network Ghana

I.N. Network Ghana began in 1991 under the leadership of Rev. Walter Pimpong. It was a catalyst in the country for the liberation of girls and women being held in bondage by occult priests of fetish temples, a practice of traditional African religion. This tradition dictates that when a relative commits a crime, ranging in severity from petty theft to murder, the family must offer a virgin daughter. These girls are typically eight to fifteen years of age and are taken to live at the local shrine where they become *Trokosi*, or “a wife of the gods.” The priest then exerts full

ownership rights over each girl, beating her when she tries to escape, controlling her interaction with others, demanding labor and sex from her, and denying her education, food, and basic health services.

I.N. Network Ghana negotiates the release of these *Trokosi*, often securing an agreement that a shrine will not take in any new slaves. Through counseling, literacy education, vocational training, Bible teaching and a micro-credit plan, I.N. Network Ghana helps these women gain new lives for themselves and their children. Entire villages have been liberated from the bondage of worshipping false gods because of this ministry to the *Trokosi*. Many now worship the true and living LORD God.



With your support, the IN Network can continue to break the cycle of *Trokosi* and answer the prayers deep in the hearts of these desperate women. Please visit our website to find out how you can help break the cycle of the *Trokosi* system – www.innetworkusa.org. Together we can free women, girls like Esther, and children born into life at the shrine.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...

Isaiah 61:1

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