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Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen: An Ordinary Family’s Extraordinary Tale of Love, Loss, and Survival in Congo

Lisa J Shannon

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Driven by her family's devastating losses, Congolese expatriate Francisca Thelin embarks, with human rights activist Lisa J. Shannon, on a perilous journey back to her beloved homeland, now under the shadow of one of Africa's most feared militias—Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army. With gunmen camped at the edge of town, Francisca is forced to face a paralyzing clash between her life in America and her family's rapidly evaporating world—and the reality that their rush to her family's aid may backfire.

Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen weaves Francisca's journey with stories of the family's harrowing encounters with gunmen and tales from their past to create a vivid, illuminating portrait of a place and its people. We hear of Mama Koko's early life as a gap-toothed beauty plotting to escape her inevitable fate of wife and motherhood; of Papa Alexander's empire of wives, each of whom he married because she cooked and cleaned and made good coffee; and of Francisca's idyllic childhood, when she ran barefoot through the family's coffee plantation gorging herself on mangoes and fish that "were the size of small children."

Offering compelling testimony to the strength of the human spirit and the beauty of human connection in the darkest of times, *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* also explores what it means and requires to truly make a difference in an unjust and often violent world.

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