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TO ALESSIA, MY SISTER, AND TO ALL THE AMAZING QUEENS
WHO HAVE SUPPORTED ME THROUGHOUT THE YEARS.
THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART.
O.I.



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AFRICAN QUEENS

INCREDIBLE STORIES OF AFRICA'S LEGENDARY WOMEN LEADERS



ONYINYE IWU

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INTRODUCTION

I love history and I believe it is important learn about the past in order to help us understand our selves. As a young African girl growing up in Italy, I often felt disconnected from what I was taught in History lessons – Africa only featured three times: ancient Egypt, slavery and colonization.

Once I moved to the UK as a teenager I learnt more during Black History Month about some African American history, slavery and the Civil Rights movement there and in the UK.

But what was happening in Africa itself?

Through some research, I discovered the numerous and magnificent civilizations which developed in Africa over the centuries and I was amazed to find out that women actually played a massive role in shaping and ruling these kingdoms. But apart from Queen Cleopatra, nobody I asked knew the name of an African queen!

This book shines a light on women from all over Africa, throughout history who made a huge impact in their communities both before Europeans began to settle, or colonize, the continent and during their time of colonial control. Many inspiring Africans worked to take back control of their lands. These women were powerful leaders, thinkers, warriors and protectors who did not let anything stop them from fighting for what they believed in.

Women and girls all over the world are often looked down upon and seen as weak or not valuable, this is especially true in some African communities. I hope that reading these stories inspires and encourages girls all over the world to believe in themselves and let their inner **QUEEN** shine.

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CIRCA.
1504–1459 BCE

QUEEN HATSHEPSUT

THE PHARAOH QUEEN

A ruler in ancient Egypt was called the Pharaoh. In its 3000-year history, only a handful of pharaohs were women. Hatshepsut was one of them, a powerful queen of a great civilization.



I WAS BORN TO RULE.

Hatshepsut was the daughter of a pharaoh, Thutmose I, and married to another, Thutmose II, her half-brother. When her husband died, her stepson became Thutmose III. But he was only three years old – far too young to rule! As an important member of the royal family, Hatshepsut first became Thutmose III's regent (a stand-in ruler) and soon after she became a pharaoh too, ruling alongside her stepson. Hatshepsut made sure that everyone knew she was in control.

Pharaoh Hatshepsut wore the symbols of a pharaoh's power: a cobra headdress and a fake beard. She ordered statues that made her look like a man.

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I WANT PEACE, NOT WAR.

Hatshepsut means "Foremost of Noble Ladies" and she was known for trading with neighbouring peoples, rather than starting costly wars. Her ships sailed down the Red Sea to trade in the Land of Punt, exchanging gold for prized goods, like incense, myrrh trees and cattle.



A GREAT PHARAOH BUILDS!

During the years Hatshepsut reigned, Egypt grew very rich. The queen used some of this wealth to build great temples. Her most famous building is the huge Temple of Deir el-Bahri, which was decorated with scenes from the expedition to Punt. When she died, her successors tried to rub out the memory of Hatshepsut – perhaps they did not like it that a woman had ruled so well. But archaeologists have helped us rediscover the great pharaoh queen, her successful rule and impressive buildings, many of which still stand today.

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CIRCA. 60–10 BCE

QUEEN AMANIRENAS

THE QUEEN WHO DEFIED THE ROMANS

The Romans had conquered Egypt. Its Queen, Cleopatra, was dead and now the Romans wanted to capture more African land. But another powerful queen, Amanirenas, had other ideas. And not even losing an eye in battle was going to stop her.

YOUR PEOPLE SALUTE YOU, GREAT KANDAKE.

Amanirenas was the leader of the Kingdom of Kush, a country grown rich by trading with Egypt to its north. Her people called Amanirenas "Kandake", their word for queen. Like other warrior Kandake before her, she was an expert fighter. She was loved by her people, ruling them on her own after her husband died.

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NOW I CAN WALK OVER MY ENEMY!

Amanirenas knew the Romans were sure to invade her wealthy kingdom soon. She took a bold decision – to attack their armies in Egypt before they attacked her. The Kushite army fought hard. They captured the Roman-held cities of Syene, Elephantine and Philae. To show her power, she beheaded a statue of Augustus Caesar, the Roman emperor at the time. It was buried under a Kushite temple.



The bronze head with glass eyes stayed under the temple for nearly 2000 years. Imagine the surprise when an archaeologist uncovered it! Today it is displayed in the British Museum.

FEED THEM TO THE LIONS!

The Romans were furious and sent an army to invade Kush. They destroyed one of their cities and sold the Kushite captives as slaves, but Amanirenas refused to surrender. She fought back fiercely. After three years of fighting, the Emperor Augustus and Amanirenas made peace – on the Queen's terms.

Augustus did not ask for any tribute gifts and the Roman armies left Kush. It was a deal that would last for centuries. Brave Queen Amanirenas had taken on the Romans – and won.

Some legends say that she used war elephants to attack the Roman soldiers.

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CIRCA. 15 CE

QUEEN ARAWELO

THE FEMINIST QUEEN

The women of Somalia have been telling tales of the legendary Arawelo for over 2000 years. Passed down from mother to daughter, they say she was a great queen of their land.



IT'S TIME FOR GIRL POWER!

Arawelo was the eldest of three royal daughters. When her parents died, she became queen of her land, which stretched from the sea into the high mountains. Life was difficult for women at that time, but Arawelo was determined to change that.

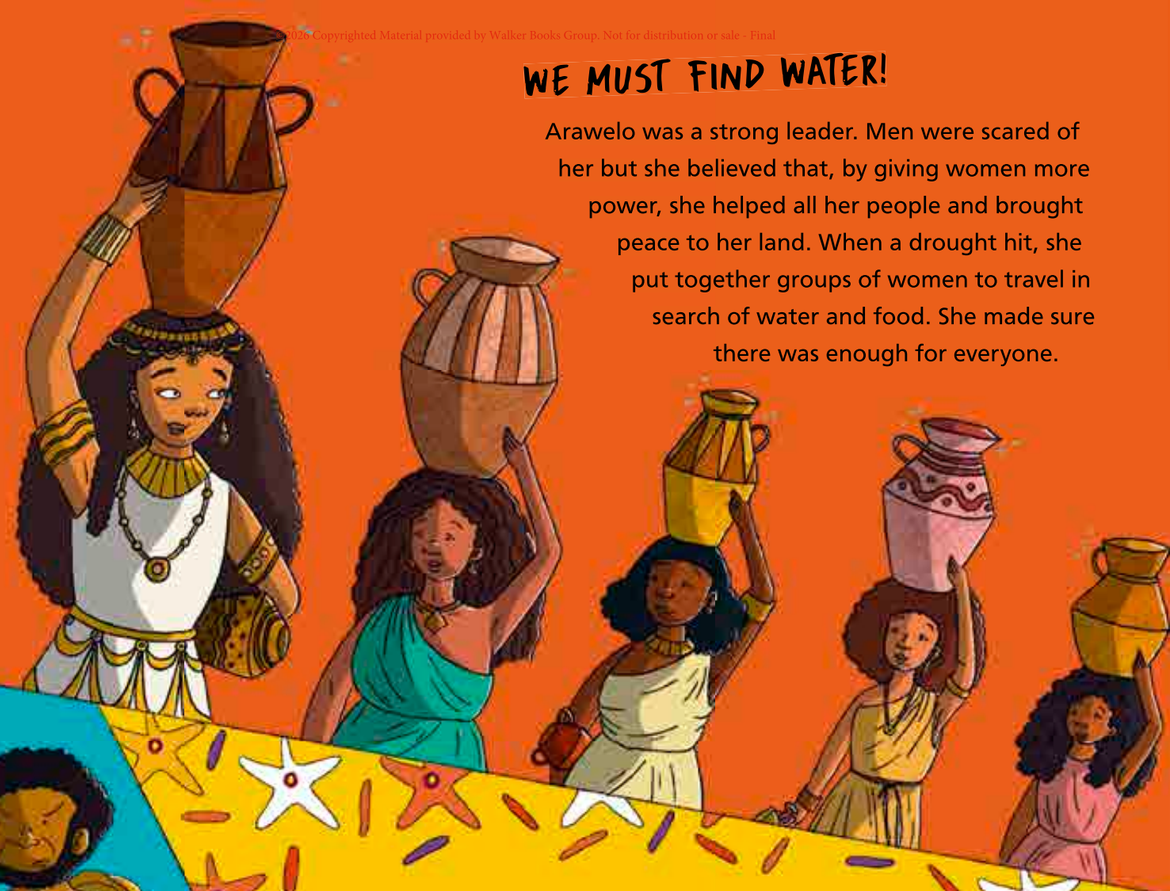
WE MUST GO ON STRIKE!

Men wanted women to stay at home and look after children. They did not think women were important. Arawelo did not agree! To make her point, she asked the wives to stop doing their house work and child care. They stopped tending the crops. The men soon realized how much they needed the women and their work.

Arawelo did everything in her power to make sure that men and women were treated equally in her kingdom. She replaced many of the male leaders with women to ensure that power was more balanced.



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WE MUST FIND WATER!

Arawelo was a strong leader. Men were scared of her but she believed that, by giving women more power, she helped all her people and brought peace to her land. When a drought hit, she put together groups of women to travel in search of water and food. She made sure there was enough for everyone.

WE LEAVE FLOWERS FOR THE QUEEN.

The Queen had a grandson. Arawelo did not want this boy to take over from her but many others did. Arawelo was killed. Today, men tell terrible tales of her cruelty, but women tell another story. They pass the place where she is thought be buried and leave flowers. They remember a queen who fought for women's equality and who ruled her people in peace.

