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Opening extract from

One Hen

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This is Kojo.

Kojo tugs the knot tight and hoists a bundle of firewood on to his head. Since his father died, he has had to leave school and help his mother collect wood to sell at the market. It is the last load of the day and he is tired and hungry.

Kojo and his mother live in a mud-walled house with an open fire for cooking. Beside it is a garden where they grow their own food. They never have much money or much to eat.

As Kojo nears the house, he can smell *fufu* cooking. This is their main meal, made from cassava and yams. He begins to walk faster.





This is the loan that Kojo gets.



Kojo and his mother live in a village in Ghana, a country in West Africa. The 20 families in the village do not have very much money, but they do have a good idea. Each family promises to save a bit of money. One family will borrow all the savings to buy something important.

The Achempong family is first to borrow the money. They buy two cartloads of fruit, which they sell for a profit at the market. When they pay back the loan, the Duodu family borrows the money to buy a sewing machine. They turn the cloth they weave into shirts and dresses to sell.

One day it is the turn of Kojo's mother. She uses the loan to buy a cart so she can carry more firewood to market. She also hopes to rent the cart to people who need transport.

There are a few coins left over. Kojo asks if he can have them to buy something for himself. He has a good idea, too.

Kojo's idea is to buy a hen. He and his mother will eat some of the eggs it lays and sell the rest at the market. There is a farmer in a neighbouring village with many hens, and Kojo will ask to buy one.

It takes Kojo two hours to walk to the chicken farm. By the time he arrives, he is hot and dusty. He wonders how he will know which hen to choose. There are so many!

Kojo tries to look at *all* the hens. A white one pecks the ground near his foot. Should he choose this hen? A speckled one flaps her wings and clucks. Perhaps she is the one? Then Kojo spies a plump brown hen with a bright red comb sitting in her nest, puffing out her feathers. She looks as if she would enjoy laying eggs. Now he doesn't have to think: he knows in his heart that she is the one.

Kojo pays for the brown hen and puts her in a wicker basket. He gently covers the hen with a cloth and lifts the basket on to his head. As he walks home, he dreams about the future and he sees a lot of eggs in it – eggs to eat and, if he is lucky, eggs that he can sell to buy more hens.

That night he puts the basket with the hen beside his sleeping mat to keep it safe.

