

## The Earth Summary

All that the Johnson had was the earth-very often it seemed as if it were all they had ever had.

It was true that they also had possessions-a plough, a two-wheeled cart, tools, a bony brown mare which slowly dragged the plough and the cart about their rough four-acre plot-but without the earth these things were useless. It was true that they also had a son.

It was more than thirty years since the Johansons, realising that he was not quite like others, had taken Benjy to a doctor. This doctor had persuaded them that he needed interests that would strengthen his mind. It would be good if they gave him something to do, some occupation, which would help his development. It would help a great deal if they gave him a special interest to feed him sense of responsibility, you are people on the land, the doctor said, let him keep hens.

So for many years Benjy had kept hens, and what the earth was to him mother and father the hens were to Benjy they were almost all he had. When he came from school, cut off by his simplicity from other children, Benjy went straight home to his hens, which He kept in a wire coop that his father had made at the back of the house. At first he kept Ten or a dozen hens, all colours and breeds, brown and specked and black and white, and the coop was small.

He fed the hens simply, on scraps from the table, seeded cabbages strung from the wire, a little maize, and on corn-ears which he gleaned in the late summer from his father a acre of stubble. It is possible that a hen, being a simple creature thrives best on simple treatment. Benjy understood the first and last thing about a hen. That it exists for no other purpose than to have and lay eggs. It is not to become highly complicated and commercialized. Eggs were cheap, hens mysteriously pecked nourishment off the bare earth. They sat in a home-made nesting-box, on straw, and laid the eggs expected of them.