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THE READING



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RHODA

Rhoda had to flee

 DORTHE NIELSEN  WILLIAM VEST-LILLESØE

I have not always been living here. When I was little, we lived in a different village. It was called Wernyiol. It is far away. But then the war came. We had to flee. Now we live in my uncle's house in Lologo, the one in the picture. We have lived here for three years. My name is Rhoda and I am nine years old. I am in the first grade at school. The school is next to our house and is called Saint Andrea.





I really like my school. I have a lot of friends here. My favourite subject is Maths. I am very good at that. When I grow up, I want to have my own office. Then I can work there every day. My uncle has an office in town. At the moment, the school is closed because of the holidays. But we often go there to play.



One of my best friends is also called Rhoda. It is funny that we have the same name. We often play together. We like to play with our teddy bears. We also play skipping games. The most fun is playing kebe. You have to avoid being hit by the ball. If you are hit, you are out. We have made the ball ourselves out of some socks.

In my family, there is my mom and dad, my older brother Kwek and my older sister Agaau. She is twenty years old and has her own family. She has a daughter. Her name is Aleek. She is one and a half years old and very sweet. I can take care of her. Right now, Agaau, Aleek and I are home alone. The rest of the family is at a party. We also have a dog. It is called Junub. In our language, Dinka, it means "one who comes from the south". Junub is a good dog. It guards the house. It is also very good at chasing rats and scorpions away.






I often help my mom. I fetch water and do the dishes. If we need something, I will go to the market to look for it. I also help with cooking. We mostly make kisra, which is a kind of pancake that we make from corn flour. We eat it with a green sauce called gudura. It is made from green leaves. It is really tasty.





A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding an open book. The person is wearing a black and white striped shirt. The background is blurred, showing a person's face and a window with sheer curtains. The text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

I do not remember a lot from the war. My older sister has told me that it took us a whole month to arrive in Lologo. We could not bring anything. Not even clothes. We had to leave really fast. We walked during the night and hid in the thicket during the day. I was very afraid when I heard gunshots. I also saw some dead people covered in blood. That was terrible. My mom carried me some of the way and comforted me.



In the beginning, after moving here, I dreamt about the war. I woke up in the middle of the night believing that I had heard gunshots. My body was shaking all over. Thankfully, it has stopped. I do not dream about the war anymore.



When peace comes, we will go back to our old village. So says my sister, anyway. But I also like it here with my friends.



On the website, you can see Rhoda and her friends skip and play kebe, which is a kind of dodgeball. You can also find the recipe for the pancakes that Rhoda tells us about.

**HELEVERDENISKOLE.DK/
RHODA**





ADENG

My biggest wish is a school uniform

 **DORTHE NIELSEN**  **WILLIAM VEST-LILLESØE**

“I really want to continue school. But I do not know if my mom can continue to afford it,” says 12-year-old Adeng. The thought of having to quit school makes the smile in her brown eyes disappear. Adeng is in the fifth grade at the all-girls school in the town of Aweil in the north-western part of South Sudan. It is a big school with almost 1,200 students.

“My biggest wish is to get a school uniform,” she continues. “I have been at the school for almost five years, but I have never had a uniform. All the older students have uniforms and next year I will be in the sixth grade.”

Adeng’s family

Adeng’s family include her father, her mother, five older brothers and one little sister. Only some of them live in Aweil. “My three oldest brothers are soldiers. It has been a long time since we saw them. We do not know where they are. My dad has gone back to Khartoum. I doubt he will return this time.” Adeng’s voice is low and she looks away. “I am sad that he has left. I would like him to be here with us. He did not even say goodbye,” she explains.

Khartoum is the capital of Sudan. The entire family lived there for several years. Back then, the older boys went to an Arabic school. When South Sudan became independent in 2011, they all moved back to Aweil. Since then, the father has often travelled to Khartoum for work.

Adeng currently lives with her mother, two brothers aged 16 and 18 and her 3-year-old little sister. They live in three small

huts made out of rush mats. Plastic makes parts of the roof waterproof. They use one of the huts as a kitchen. There is no electricity or water in the huts. They get the water from a pump close to the school. They have a small solar lamp that can be used for reading in the evenings.

Adeng's mother has a teashop

On a dusty road close to the market, Adeng's mother Nethalima has a teashop. Every day she sells a variety of tea and small snacks. The tea is served in glasses. People come to the small café with the plastic chairs to take a break from their everyday tasks. The water in the small kettle is boiling. Nethalima is cleaning the glasses to make them ready for new costumers. She is shyly smiling while she speaks. "I am alone with the kids now. We have to take care of ourselves the best we can. I hope that my sons find jobs so that they can help earn money for our family." People in Aweil have not been too affected by the civil war. But the area is very poor. The development has come to a halt. Every year during the dry period, people and animals are suffering from a lack of food

You can taste many varieties of tea in Nethalima's teashop.





Awein, the best friend of Adeng, is 14 years old. She had to leave school in the second grade when her mother died. She hopes that she will be able to return someday.

and water. Because of that, Adeng does not know whether she can continue in school.

Adeng's best friend had to quit school

Adeng's best friend is called Awein. They started in the first grade together. But during the second grade, Awein's mother became ill and died. Awein had to quit school to take care of the house and her younger siblings. Her father married again, but the family is still unable to send Awein back to school.

The two friends see each other every day. They often look at Adeng's schoolbooks together. Adeng reads out loud and shows Awein the different assignments so she can keep on track. "It is not that easy," Adeng explains, "and I still hope that Awein can someday go back to school."

"We also do other stuff together," Adeng adds with a smile. "We skip and sing. On Fridays and Saturdays we join a club at the church. At the club we meet a lot of other people and sing and dance together. We always look forward to these days."

There is not time for fun every day. Both the girls have a lot of chores at home. They fetch water at the well, cook, do the dishes and take care of their younger siblings.

School is important

Adeng explains that her school lacks classrooms. This means that there are too many students in each classroom. "If everyone is present, we are probably 80 students in the same room.



Adeng has bought the red and yellow fabric for her school uniform. She will bring it to the local tailor who will make her uniform.



Adeng is standing in front of one of her family's three huts. Look how the rush mats have been fastened with cords. Some of the green plastic sticks out from under the roof.



Cecilia Alfred Majok is the principal at Adeng's school called Salam Girls Primary School. She believes that all-girls schools are a good idea. "The girls are not disturbed. They are more daring when there are only girls, and that way they will learn more."



Some of us have to sit on the floor." Adeng shrugs and then adds: "But I really like my school. My favourite subject is English. We have a great teacher. He makes a lot of funny games in English even though we are so many."

Her mother listens to her story. "I only went briefly to school. I cannot read or write. But I want my daughter to go to school and get an education." She points at the youngest daughter, 3-year old Adut, who is playing in the corner. "If both of my girls go to school, maybe they can get an education. Then they can take better care of themselves and help me when I get old. Luckily, I have earned enough money to buy a school uniform for Adeng," she says and takes out the money.

Adeng's eyes are shining with joy. Together with Awein she rushes down to the market to buy fabric in the red and yellow colours of the school. The school has been closed for a few weeks because of the holidays. Adeng hopes that the tailor will be able to finish her uniform before the school reopens.



On the website, you can find photos of the town of Aweil. You can watch a movie about the day Adeng gets her new uniform. You can also see which subjects they teach in school in South Sudan.

**HELEVERDENISKOLE.DK/
ADENG**





**NGOR &
CHAN**

The shoeshine twins

 **DORTHE NIELSEN**  **WILLIAM VEST-LILLESØE**

It is early in the morning. Coming from inside the small huts, you can hear the clatter of pots and pans, firewood and water cans. The twins Ngor and Chan wake up and head out in the twilight. A long day has begun. They take turns fetching water and lighting the fire. Today Ngor picks up the yellow jerry can and heads out for the water pump at the school. If he walks fast, he can be one of the first at the pump. Sometimes there is a line in the morning. He is lucky—there is only one girl waiting when he turns around the corner at the school's entrance. The jerry can, which he will carry home on his head, contains almost 20 litres of water. When he walks home, the sky has brightened.

Ngor and Chan are 12 years old. They live in the town Aweil in the north-western part of the country. They live with their aunt Rebecca. In the town, they can work and go to school. Before moving to Aweil, they lived in the village Udhum with their mother and three siblings. Their father passed away when they were small, so they have to help their mother earn money for the family. There are no jobs in the village and no school either.

The village is located some miles from Aweil. It takes almost an hour to walk there. There are no bus connections. During the rainy season, the roads often get flooded. It would be completely impossible to live there and go back and forth each day. That is why they now live with Rebecca.

English, Maths and football

By the time Ngor returns with the water, Chan has lit the fire and Rebecca is preparing breakfast. After they have eaten and

cleaned up, it is time to go to school. School starts at eight o'clock. They are in the fourth grade. "The school is nice," says Chan looking at Ngor. "My favourite subjects are English and Maths," adds Ngor. Chan nods. The boys explain that you have to be good at English to get an education, and that they use math every day when they work as shoeshine boys. The school day ends at one o'clock. It is tempting to stay and play football with the other kids, but that will not do. Ngor and Chan hurry home with their school books and grab the bag with the shoeshine kit.

Are there any shoes that need polishing or repairing?

Usually, Ngor and Chan are part of a group of four or five boys who walk around to find customers together. They shake their rattles to make people aware that the shoeshine boys are coming. Their rattles are made out of empty cans of leather fat. They put

The boys help each other. Here they are working on one shoe each.





Ngor and Chan bought shoe polish and brushes at the market, but their tools are homemade.

pebbles in the cans and nailed them to sticks. They shake the rattles or hit them against their legs as they walk. It is tough to walk around the dusty streets for hours. The boys have a fixed route. They usually walk down the main street and past the market. If they get a customer on the street, they find a chair for the customer to sit on. Then they sit on the ground and fix the customer's shoes. They have everything they need in their bag; shoe polish in different colours, brushes, string, needles, their rattles and awls, which can also be used to pierce the shoe soles when the shoes need stitching.

But the boys prefer to be around the little hotel, which also has a restaurant. Here they can find people who are visiting the town or participating in meetings. These people have a little more money than the locals do. The boys can also sit peacefully underneath the big shady tree in the middle of the yard to work. Sometimes they also get some leftover food.



Rebecca has a market stall where she sells vegetables and peanuts from farms in the nearby area.

The boys' earnings depend on what needs to be done with the shoes. Most people just get their shoes polished. The price for a polish is 10 Sudanese Pounds (roughly 40 Euro cents). But sometimes the shoes have holes that need stitching, which earn the boys more money. When the work day is over, they share the money between them.

Ngor and Chan have worked as shoeshine boys for three months. "Before that we helped out at the market where Rebecca has a stall, but we earn more money polishing shoes," says Ngor. "We have learned to polish and fix shoes by observing the other boys. We learned quite fast," Ngor continues. "The worst days are when none of us have a single customer all day. That happens," says Chan while throwing up his hands.

The family needs the money

The day has grown dark before Ngor and Chan eat dinner. In South Sudan, day and night are equally long all year-round. The sun is up from seven in the morning to seven in the evening—and you have to take advantage of the daylight. The boys are tired after a long day. "We save the money in a can and give it to our mom when she comes to town. She comes a few times a week," Ngor explains. "Sometimes she brings vegetables from the village."

They go to sleep on the mats in the hut. Fortunately, they have some money in the can. The family needs it for food, clothes and school fees.



On the website, you can see Ngor and Chan in action as shoeshine boys. You can also join a tour around the town of Aweil.

**HELEVERDENISKOLE.DK/
NGOR-OG-CHAN**



STAGE 2



69

**SIMON &
SAMUEL**



Simon and Samuel are refugees in their own country

 **DORTHE NIELSEN**  **WILLIAM VEST-LILLESØE**

A dirt road leads from the gate to the school. Children are playing while the adults are talking, cooking and washing clothes. The sun is shining from a clear blue sky. Beyond the school, the road narrows in. The houses are made from tarp, thin poles and string. They are set up closely. A few containers are scattered in between. People live in those as well. The road winds its way like a maze – it is easy to get lost. A couple of boys are struggling with a heavy wheelbarrow with flour sacks. Space is scarce on the bumpy road. A little wooden bridge connects two areas. Four roads meet and create some extra space. This is where the water pump is located, and some boys use the space to play football.

We are in a big refugee camp on the outskirts of South Sudan's capital Juba. Simon aged 11 and Samuel aged 15 have lived here for almost three years. They are refugees in their own country. The camp has been established by the UN and is protected by fences, barbedwire and soldiers.

The brothers live in different places in the camp. They have the same father, but not the same mother. "However, we are still together every day," says Simon. "We meet at school and sometimes also play football." Samuel explains that the entire family came back to South Sudan around three years ago. They came from a refugee camp in Uganda. They had fled to Uganda because of the war. They returned when South Sudan became independent. Then civil war broke out, and they did not have a

safe place to stay. "That is why we still live in a refugee camp," he says dryly.

Simon's daily life

Simon is living with his mother, two aunts and three siblings. "We built the house ourselves with tarp. There is very little space inside, but we spend most of the time out anyway," he says. Most days he is helping out at home. He fetches water and looks for firewood. On the days where food is distributed, he takes care of getting it to the house. "My mom is one of the food distributors. It is her job. We are lucky, because only few have a job here."

Simon goes to school from Monday to Friday. He is in the third grade. "The school is nice. My favourite subject is Maths. But I also enjoy reading." When the school day is over, he strolls around with the other boys. "There is not much to do here," he explains. "If we can find a ball, we play football. I spend most of

Simon and his friend Gat Wech try to tame the kittens.





Samuel stands in the doorway to the container with his friend Daily.

my time with my best friend Gat Wech, my older brother and his friends.”

Samuel lives in a container

“I do not remember exactly when we got the container,” Samuel says. “There are no windows, so it is quite dark in there, but in the rainy season they are better than the tents. Both the roads and the tents get flooded if it rains a lot,” he explains.

Samuel is very fond of his school. “If I could not go to school and learn something, it would be even more boring to be here,” he says. His favourite subject is Natural Science. “It is good to learn something about the world,” as he puts it. He explains that both Simon and he want to be doctors “because it is almost impossible to get help if you become sick.”

Apart from school, Samuel cares about his friends and football. “I am crazy about football. My favourite team is Barcelona. If there is enough electricity and someone has a functioning television, we watch football. And we play whenever possible.” Samuel gets



The boys' teacher, Duop Koay Luak. He explains that all the school's teachers are refugees themselves.

up and goes inside the container. He returns with a beautiful pair of blue football boots. He smiles from ear to ear. "Look at this! They are brand new – I got them from my dad. They are the best thing I own," he grins.

We want to stay in South Sudan

The boys agree that they do not want to go back to Uganda. "We want to stay here in South Sudan—hopefully in Malakal. We know people who live there." Malakal is a big city in the northern part of the country close to the Nile and the Sudanese boarder.

"The most important thing is to just get away from the camp," Samuel declares. "I want to go to school and get an education so that I can take care of my family." He hesitates for a moment. "My greatest dream is to live in my own house—a place where I can be free while there is peace in our country."



On the website, you can read more about the refugee camp. In the movie, Samuel and Simon show you the camp, the school and their homes.

**HELEVERDENISKOLE.DK/
SIMON-OG-SAMUEL**





JAMES

SOUTH SUDAN

Never a soldier again

 **DORTHE NIELSEN**  **WILLIAM VEST-LILLESØE**

"I was a soldier for almost two years. In those two years, I was afraid most of the time. I was just 11 years old when I was captured." 14-year-old James unfolds his story while looking down and drawing lines with a stick in the sand.

As he straightens his back, a smile has returned to his eyes. "I came back to the village one year ago. In the beginning, I often had nightmares. Every night I woke up believing that I had heard a gunshot. Fortunately, it is not like that anymore. A lot of good things have happened since then, so I rarely think of my time as a soldier."

James was a soldier during the civil war

South Sudan became independent from Sudan in 2011, but it was difficult to maintain the peace. In December 2013, civil war broke out. The different ethnic groups fought about the power to govern the country. In many places, however, the fighting was also about the right to land and cattle.

James lives with his family in the village Ganyliel in the north-western province of Unity State. He belongs to an ethnic group called Nuer, which is the second largest group in the country. They have their own local military groups, which they call Gojam.

James is talking about the dramatic day that he was captured. "One day the village was attacked by government soldiers. I do not know why they attacked us. It was early in the morning. I was not at home, so when the soldiers came, I just started to run. I was constantly looking for my family, until suddenly I was caught, along with some other boys. Later that day the Gojam group came to defend the village. They freed us and took us with them. I was

very scared and wanted to find my family. But the Gojam group wanted us to be soldiers and I did not dare to stand up against them.” James pauses before continuing; “most of the time we were walking from place to place and hiding in the bush. I had my rifle, but I would only shoot in defence. I was the youngest in the group and I missed my family and friends every single day.”

Home again

Days, weeks and months passed. At some point, James and his group camped near the river. One early morning James was fetching water with some of the other boys when all of a sudden, they noticed three or four canoes sailing by. They had no doubt in their minds. They had to try to join them. They waved, and to their luck, the men in the canoes sailed to the shore to pick them up. They quickly got away from the camp. “No one was following us,” James reflects. “Maybe they knew that the war was coming to an end. Or perhaps they thought it was alright that we went home.”

In the rainy season, Ganyliel becomes an island. The big swampy areas become flooded and you can only reach the town by canoe.





James' mother Kathrina works every day at the market serving tea.

He shrugs. "We were sailing on the river for many days. Finally, one day we recognised our village. We were home again."

James' family was happy and very surprised to see him again. They had not known what had happened to him. They themselves had been hiding for some days before returning to the house. "One of my brothers had been shot and died. I was very sad to hear that. The rest of the family, however, was alright," James ends his story.

Today James is living with his mother, grandmother and six siblings. They have three huts that form a yard around a big Neem tree. His father has left in search for a job, and it has been a while since they saw him. His mother Kathrina earns money by serving tea at the market. "I work hard every day so we can get food and my children can go to school. I want them to get an education," she says.





James and his grandmother stand in front of their hut. It is not common to have pictures on the walls in the village huts. However, here they are holding out a photo in a frame. It shows his father and brother.



Going to school and playing football; James' favourite activities.

School is the best place to be

"The best thing I know is going to school," James says with a big smile. "We have good teachers and each day I look forward to reading and learning something new." The school principal at Ganyliel Primary School is called James Luk Phar and he is very impressed by James. "I rarely see a pupil who is learning that fast," he says. "James came to the school about two years ago and asked to start here. He had been a child soldier for more than two years. He was so eager to learn. He is already attending the fifth grade."

The school in Ganyliel does not have many materials. But they are collecting books for the small library where the pupils can spend time after school. "It will probably not take long before James has read all the books. He stays there almost every day," adds the principal. James laughs. "I go there as often as I can. I also help my mom and grandma fetch water and collect firewood. But whenever I have time, I read. Sometimes I also play football."

James pauses for a moment, looking at the puddles from the heavy rainfall in the afternoon. "I hope we will continue to have peace in the country. In any case, I will never be a soldier again. Never. I will go to school. I dream of becoming a doctor. South Sudan needs more doctors – not more soldiers."



On the website, you can join James in school and in the village. You can hear him sing and see where his mother is working. You can also read more about South Sudan's history and the civil war.

**HELEVERDENISKOLE.DK/
JAMES**





TAPITHA

A modern girl from the countryside

 DORTHE NIELSEN  WILLIAM VEST-LILLESØE

"I do not know all the old stories and songs, but my grandma does. She can sing, dance and tell all the stories about our history and customs." 16-year-old Tapitha points to her grandmother with a smile and adds; "I like newer songs and music better. In school, for example, we learned a song about South Sudan and our neighboring countries. We also sing songs about how important school is. We will perform the songs at a big party for all the schools in the area."

The story of my grandma

Tapitha explains that her grandmother has lived with them for three years. She is originally from a place called Panyijiar, which is further south. Her village was burned to the ground during the war and she brought nothing with her. If possible, she would like to go back some day. "However, that will be difficult, since all of the houses are gone," Tapitha says. "My grandma doubts that there will ever be real peace in our country," she continues. "Our family belongs to the Nuer people and as I mentioned, my grandma knows a lot of the Nuer songs and stories. But there are also a lot of other peoples in South Sudan, who have their own songs and stories."

Tapitha fiddles with her bracelet and continues her train of thought: "That is why I like the new songs about South Sudan—they are for everyone."

Tapitha wants to become a teacher

Tapitha lives with her family in the town Ganyliel in the province of Unity State. The town is in a swampy area where the land is hard to cultivate. Many families also have cattle and goats. In the rainy season, the town becomes isolated like an island. The swampy areas flood, and the only way to reach the town is by canoe. The family's three huts are surrounded by a fence. In the middle there is a courtyard where the family can sit. Tapitha has decorated the huts with different figures. She thinks it looks pretty. One of the huts is used as a kitchen and for storing food.

Tapitha is in the seventh grade—she did not start school until she was nine. Because of the war, there was no school before that time. The buildings were destroyed and there were no teachers left in town. “I really like my school. We learn a lot. I like reading the most, and it is my big dream to become a teacher myself,” she says. “I have actually never left Unity State, but I think it

A lot of people wanted to join the family portrait. Some of the smaller children are neighbors.





Tapitha has painted the figures on the huts. She thinks it looks pretty.

would be very exciting to go to Juba one day to become a teacher.” Her eyes sparkle at the thought of it.

Tapitha’s daily life

Tapitha goes to school in the afternoon. In the morning, the classrooms are used for the younger students. Before leaving for school, Tapitha fetches water from the town pump and helps her grandmother prepare the food. Some days she also needs to grind grain for kisra, which is a kind of pancake. The family owns a little piece of land where they grow sorghum. Sorghum looks like corn. The fruit is a round nut, which can be white, yellow or red and is used for cooking. The plant can endure hard drought. When there is no water, the leaves roll up and the plant goes into dormancy. Tapitha helps with weeding and harvesting.

Fortunately, there is also time to hang out with friends. “I have a lot of friends,” Tapitha says. “My best friend is called Gorden—she is also 16 years old. We sing and read a lot when we are together. If we can get hold of a ball, we also like to play volleyball. We play in the big square by the school.”



Tapitha's grandmother Kuluot Puol enjoys performing a dance and telling the old stories of the Nuer people.

Eleven cows for a bride

In South Sudan, many 16-year-old girls are married and have already had their first child. The principal at Tapitha's school would like more girls to stay in school. "Things are moving in the right direction, but they are changing too slowly," he says thoughtfully. "A lot of schools had to close during the war and people had to flee. Moreover, we are in the countryside where it is normal to marry off your daughters at a young age. The family gets a dowry for the girls, and then there is one mouth less to feed. That is important when you are poor."

Ganyliel is located in a part of South Sudan where people have traditionally lived as nomads alongside their animals. "The animals are the families' savings," the principal explains. "A dowry is often arranged in numbers of cattle. Eleven cows are the minimum price for a bride, but the parents can make other agreements. A family can get 20 or even 40 cows when they marry off their daughter."

Fortunately, Tapitha has been allowed to continue going to school. She frowns and thinks for a little while before she says: "I am the youngest in my family. I have two older brothers, and my mom and dad do not live together anymore. My dad has a new wife, and he has a child with her. Maybe that is why I get to decide more for myself."



On the website, you can see what the town of Ganyliel looks like. You can see where Tapitha lives, hear her sing some new songs and see her grandmother dancing and telling stories.

**HELEVERDENISKOLE.DK/
TAPITHA**



RHODA



ADENG



NGOR OG CHAN



SIMON OG SAMUEL



JAMES



TAPITHA



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