"I have a problem, Agogo," said Etina. Etina’s grandmother lifted a tall wooden pole, then dropped its smooth, rounded end into a wooden bowl. “Tell me,” she said.

“My problem is as big as Africa,” said Etina.

Agogo smiled. “Are you sure? Maybe it’s really just the size of a cornhusk.”

Etina touched the dried corn sitting inside the bowl. It needed more pounding. She tried to lift the pole, but it was almost as heavy as she was. Agogo wrapped her warm hands around Etina’s hands. Together they pounded the corn.

“Our teacher has picked a pen pal for each of us. I will write letters to a girl in America, and she will write to me.”

“Good!” said Agogo. “You can tell her about our village in Malawi, and she can teach you about where she lives.”

Etina had heard that life in America was different and exciting. She couldn’t wait to get her first letter from her pen pal. But what would she write back? “I have nothing special to tell her about.”

“Ah,” said Agogo. “I understand your worry.” She wiped her hands on her skirt. “But I want you to try something.”

“What’s that?”

“On your way to school, pretend you’re seeing everything for the first time.”

Walking to school the next morning, Etina thought about Agogo’s words as she followed the dirt path along the tea field. She paid attention to everything.

“Chik-chik-chik-chik!”

Etina crept up to a mango tree. Just as she thought: Baboons! Three of them! They leaped off the tree and ran away.

Etina reached school. She sighed. Everything on her walk had looked the same as it always did.

“You look unhappy,” said her friend Malita. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know what to write to my pen pal. There’s nothing new or interesting.”

During class that morning, Etina’s teacher said, “I have a surprise for each of you.” She started handing out envelopes. She handed one to Etina. It was a letter addressed to her. From America!