

SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



Eleventh Night: Mother Hen and Robber Hawk



Jehosophat and Marmaduke were whispering together.

“Let’s try it,” said Jehosophat.

“An’ see what happens,” added Marmaduke.

So they tiptoed into the House of the White Wyandottes and placed the big duck’s eggs in with the smaller eggs under the setting hen.

Mother Hen did not like that, oh no!

She stirred in her nest. All her feathers puffed up and she looked very much hurt.

“Duck, duck, duck!” sniffed she scornfully. And to herself she added: “What a mean way to treat a decent, respectable hen!” For White Wyandottes are very particular and very exclusive.

But after the two little imps had tiptoed out of her house, she made the best of a bad matter. She couldn’t kick the big duck’s eggs out of the nest in the box. The sides of the box were too high. So she settled down on her eggs again.

“I must keep my very own warm, anyway,” she decided.

About three weeks later there was much excitement in the House of the White Wyandottes. From the nest in the box came little noises.

“Chip, chip, chip,” sounded faintly from inside the eggs. And before the sun climbed over the Big Gold Rooster, who swung on the weather-vane on the barn, all the new little chickens had broken their eggs.

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“How nice it is to be born!” they cheeped together in a merry chorus, as they arrived in the wonderful world.

Very proud of her family was Mother Wyandotte when the little yellow balls began to run about. A few days later she was prouder still when they scampered this way and that, pecking at little bugs and ants. They worked hard for their breakfasts and dinners and suppers.

Even Father Wyandotte, the great white rooster with the magnificent red comb and curling white plumes on his tail, forgot that other rooster of whom he was so jealous. For the rooster who was always perched on the weather-vane on the barn was up so high and he shone like gold.

But now Father Wyandotte was not jealous. He walked around in his lordly way, cocking his eye at his little yellow sons and daughters as they chased the fat little bugs.

At first he would not say just how proud of them he was. He did not like to tell all his feelings at once. Sometimes he thought fighting and crowing better than being a family man. But all of a sudden he flew up on the tallest fence-post he could find, and flapped his wings. He threw back his head, opened his yellow beak, and crowed up at that gold rooster:

“Sure, sure, sure! You couldn’t do it, you couldn’t do it—couldn’t do it, do.”

No, the Gold Rooster on the weather-vane on the top of the barn, though he shone like the sun, could neither crow nor raise a family.

But Mother Wyandotte didn’t bother about anything so high in the sky as the sun and the rooster. She was busy playing nurse-maid to her little yellow children and helping them find food.

But in the afternoon she did look up at the sky. That was when something like a dark shadow sailed in the air far above the home of the White Wyandottes.

It was a great bird with wide-stretched wings, much bigger than Jim Crow. He sailed in circles, while his evil eye looked down at the frightened, scampering White Wyandottes.

“Um!” How he would like a nice chicken for lunch!

“Robber Hawk!” called all of Mother Hen’s uncles and aunts in the barnyard.

“Robber Hawk!” screamed all of her great-uncles and great-aunts too.

“Robber Hawk!” screamed all of her cousins, first, second, and third.

Loud and long barked Rover and Brownie. And little Wienerwurst stopped chasing the pretty pink pigeons.

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And even Mr. Stuckup, the turkey, had to join in the hubbub.

“Horrible robber, horrible robber,” he gobbled.

But Mother Wyandotte had called to her children. She opened her wings and under them quickly in fright they ran, all huddling together. Her wings hardly seemed large enough to cover them all, but she took them all in, every one of her children.

She was a nervous old thing, but she was a good mother, and good mother hens, good animal mothers, and our own mothers too, never seem to think of themselves when there is danger around. They just look out for their little ones.

“Robber Hawk, robber! Shan’t touch ‘em—robber!” she said.

Then—quick as a wink—there was another loud noise, just like that day when Jim Crow fell in the cornfield.

“Bang, bang!”

Jehosophat, Marmaduke and Hepzebiah jumped.

They looked around.

There stood the Toyman with the gun at his shoulder.

Little puffs of smoke like white feathers floated away from the muzzles of the gun.

“Winged him, anyway!” cried the Toyman.

They looked up.

Robber Hawk wasn’t sailing in the sky any longer.

He was falling, falling, like a stone—just like Jim Crow.

“The Toyman’s a good shot,” exclaimed Jehosophat. “My, how I wish I could shoot like that!”

Mother Green came to the back door.

She called to the Toyman:

“He’s fallen on the barn, Frank.”

“Roof, roof, roof!” barked little Wienerwurst to explain it more clearly.

Sure enough, Robber Hawk dropped on the roof of the barn, right by the Gold Rooster who swung on the weather-vane.

The Toyman scratched his head.

“Quite a climb for these stiff legs,” said he.

But he fetched a tall ladder and placed it against the side of the barn.

The three children watched him, their heads bent back so far that they almost snapped off.

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Mother held the ladder at the foot, for nobody wanted anything ever to happen to the Toyman.

“Careful!” she warned him.

“All right, Mis’ Green,” he said. “I haven’t been up in the maintop for nothing.”

You see, once upon a time, he had been a sailor. There was nothing that the Toyman hadn’t done.

He reached the top of the ladder, then swung out on the roof. At last he reached the ridge.

There stood the Gold Rooster, never crowing or saying anything at all. And under him lay Robber Hawk, and he didn’t say anything either.

Carefully the Toyman climbed down from the ridge of the barn, holding the rascal in his hands. Then one by one down the rungs of the ladder he came.

When he reached the ground Jehosophat, Marmaduke and Hepzebiah gathered round.

Robber Hawk hung limp from the Toyman’s hand.

His dark brown feathers never stirred. His white breast with its dark bars and patches never moved.

“Robber Hawk,” spoke the Toyman, “your old curved beak will never feed on any more good chicken.”

Then he turned to the children.

“We must bury him by Jim Crow.”

So Jehosophat, Marmaduke, Hepzebiah, Rover, Brownie, Wienerwurst and the Toyman marched with Robber Hawk on towards the cornfield.

There by the side of Jim Crow they buried him.

And the Toyman took two pieces of wood. On these he cut with his knife:

JIM CROW
KILLED 1918
THIEF

ROBBER HAWK
KILLED 1918
THIEF AND MURDERER

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At their heads he placed the two boards side by side.

“There we will leave them,” the Toyman spoke sternly, “as a warning to all evil-doers.”

So they walked back slowly to the House of the White Wyandottes where Mother Hen clucked contentedly once more and all the yellow chickens ran around, chasing the little bugs in their game of hide-and-seek. A fine game it was too, only it was more interesting for the chickens than the bugs, you see.

The three happy children noticed that one of the little yellow fellows was larger than the others. He—

“Ting—ting—ting—ting—ting—ting—ting!”

“End—that—tale—to—mor—row—night.”

So says the Little Clock. He must be obeyed. So good-bye for a little while.