



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Cockyloo

Louise M. Alcott

In the barnyard, a gray hen sat on her nest, feeling very happy because it was time for her eggs to hatch, and she hoped to have a fine brood of chickens. Crack, crack, went the shells; "Peep, peep!" cried the chicks; "Cluck, cluck!" called the hen; and out came ten downy little things one after the other, all ready to run and eat and scratch,--for chickens are not like babies, and don't have to be tended at all.

There were eight little hens and two little cockerels, one black and one as white as snow, with yellow legs, bright eyes, and a tiny red comb on his head. This was Cockyloo, the good chick; but the black one was named Peck, and was a quarrelsome bad fowl, as we shall see.

Mrs. Partlet, the mamma, was very proud of her fine family; for the eight little daughters were all very pretty. She led them out into the farmyard, clucking and scratching busily; for all were hungry, and ran chirping round her to pick up the worms and seeds she found for them. Cocky soon began to help take care of his sisters; and when a nice corn or a fat bug was found, he would step back and let little Downy or Snowball have it. But Peck would run and push them away, and gobble up the food greedily. He chased them away from the pan where the meal was, and picked the down off their necks if they tried to get their share. His mother scolded him when the little ones ran to hide under her wings; but he didn't care, and was very naughty. Cocky began to crow when he was very young, and had such a fine voice that people liked to hear his loud, clear "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" early in the morning; for he woke before the sun was up, and began his song. Peck used to grumble at being roused at dawn, for he was lazy; but the hens bustled up, and were glad to get out of the hen-house.

The father cock had been killed by a dog; so they made Cocky king of the farmyard, and Peck was very jealous of him.

"I came out of the shell first, and I am the oldest; so I ought to be king," he said.

"But we don't like you, because you are selfish, cross, and lazy. We want Cocky; he is so lively, kind, and brave. He will make a splendid bird, and he must be our king," answered the hens; and Peck had to mind, or they would have pulled every feather out of his little tail.

He resolved to do some harm to his good brother, and plagued him all he could.

One day, when Cocky was swinging with three of his sisters on a bush that hung over the brook, Peck asked a stupid donkey feeding near to come and put his heavy foot on the bush. He did it, and crack went the branch, splash went the poor chicks into the water, and all were drowned but Cocky, who flew across and was saved. Poor little Hop, Chirp, and Downy went floating down the brook like balls of white foam, and were never seen again. All the hens mourned for them, and put a black feather in their heads to show how sorry they were. Mamma Partlet was heart-broken to lose three darlings at once; but Cocky comforted her, and never told how it happened, because he was ashamed to have people know what a bad bird Peck was.

A butterfly saw it all, and he told Granny Cockletop about it; and the hens were so angry that they turned Peck out of the barnyard, and he had to go and live in the woods alone. He said he didn't care; but he did, and was very unhappy, and used to go and peep into the pleasant field where the fowls scratched and talked together. He dared not show himself, for they would have driven him out. But kind Cocky saw him, and would run with some nice bit and creep through the fence into the wood, saying,--

"Poor brother, I'm sorry for you, and I'll come and play with you, and tell you the news."

Now in this wood lived a fox, and he had been planning to eat Peck as soon as he was fat; for he missed the good corn and meal he used to have, and grew very thin living on grasshoppers and berries. While he waited the sly fellow made friends with Peck, though the bird knew that foxes ate hens.



"I'm not afraid, and I don't believe old Granny Cockletop's tales. I can take care of myself, I guess," he said, and went on playing with the fox, who got him to tell all about the hen-house,--how the door was fastened, and where the plump chickens roosted, and what time they went to bed,--so that he could creep in and steal a good supper by and by. Silly Peck never guessed what harm he was doing, and only laughed when Cocky said,--

"You will be sorry if you play with the fox. He is a bad fellow; so be careful and sleep on a high branch, and keep out of his way, as I do."

Cocky was fat and large, and the fox longed to eat him, but never could, because he wisely ran home whenever he saw the rogue hiding in the wood. This made Peck angry, for he wanted his brother to stay and play; and so one day, when Cocky ran off in the midst of a nice game, Peck said to the fox,--

"See here, if you want to catch that fellow, I'll tell you how to do it. He has promised to bring me some food tonight, when all the rest are at roost. He will hide and not get shut up; then, when those cross old biddies are asleep, he will cluck softly, and I am to go in and eat all I want out of the pan. You hide on the top of the hen-house; and while he talks to me, you can pounce on him. Then I shall be the only cock here, and they will have to make me king."

"All right," said the fox, much pleased with the plan, and very glad that Peck had a chance to get fatter.

So when it was night, Peck crept through the broken paling and waited till he heard the signal. Now, good Cocky had saved up nice bits from his own dinner, and put them in a paper hidden under a bush. He spread them all out in the barnyard and called; and Peck came in a great hurry to eat them, never stopping to say, "Thank you."

Cocky stood by talking pleasantly till a little shower came up.

"Peck, dear, put this nice thick paper over you; then you will be dry, and can go on eating. I'll step under that burdock leaf and wait till you are done," said Cocky; and Peck was too busy gobbling up the food to remember anything else.

Now the fox had just crept up on the hen-house roof; and when he peeped down, there was just light enough to see a white thing bobbing about.

"Ah, ha! that's Cockyloo; now for a good supper!" And with a jump he seized Peck by the head before he could explain the mistake.

One squawk, and the naughty bird was dead; but though the paper fell off, and the fox saw what he had done, it was too late, and he began to eat Peck up, while Cocky flew into a tree and crowed so loud that the farmer ran with his gun and shot the fox before he could squeeze through the hole in the fence with the fowl in his mouth.

After that the hens felt safe, for there were no more foxes; and when they heard about Peck they did not mourn at all, but liked Cocky better than ever, and lived happily together, with nothing to trouble them.

King Cockyloo grew to be a splendid bird,--with a tall red comb on his head, long spurs on his yellow legs, many fine feathers in his tail, and eyes that shone like diamonds. His crow was so loud that it could be heard all over the neighborhood, and people used to say, "Hark! hear Farmer Hunt's cock crow. Isn't it a sweet sound to wake us in the dawn?" All the other cocks used to answer him, and there was a fine *matinée* concert every day.

He was a good brother, and led his five little sisters all about the field, feeding, guarding, and amusing them; for mamma was lame now, and could not stir far

from the yard. It was a pretty sight to see Cocky run home with a worm in his bill or a nice berry, and give it to his mother, who was very proud of her handsome son. Even old Granny Cockletop, who scolded about everything, liked him; and often said, as the hens sat scuffling in the dust,--

"A fine bird, my dears, a very fine bird, and I know he will do something remarkable before he dies."

She was right for once; and this is what he did.

One day the farmer had to go away and stay all night, leaving the old lady alone with two boys. They were not afraid; for they had a gun, and quite longed for a chance to fire it. Now it happened that the farmer had a good deal of money in the house, and some bad men knew it; so they waited for him to go away that they might steal it. Cocky was picking about in the field when he heard voices behind the wall, and peeping through a hole saw two shabby men hiding there.

"At twelve, tonight, when all are asleep, we will creep in at the kitchen window and steal the money. You shall watch on the outside and whistle if any one comes along while I'm looking for the box where the farmer keeps it," said one man.

"You needn't be afraid; there is no dog, and no one to wake the family, so we are quite safe," said the other man; and then they both went to sleep till night came.

Cocky was much troubled, and didn't know what to do. He could not tell the old lady about it; for he could only cackle and crow, and she would not understand that language. So he went about all day looking very sober, and would not chase grasshoppers, play hide-and-seek under the big burdock leaves, or hunt the cricket with his sisters. At sunset he did not go into the hen-house with the rest, but flew up to the shed roof over the kitchen, and sat there in the cold ready to scare the robbers with a loud crow, as he could do nothing else.

At midnight the men came creeping along; one stopped outside, and the other went in. Just as he came creeping along with the box, Cocky gave a loud, long crow, that frightened the robbers and woke the boys. The man with the basket ran away in such a hurry that he tumbled into a well; the other was going to get out of the window, when Cocky flew down and picked at his eyes and flapped his wings in his face, so that he turned to run some other way, and met the boys, who fired at him and shot him in the legs. The old lady popped her head out of the upper window and rang the dinner-bell, and called "Fire! fire!" so loud that it roused the neighbors, who came running to see what the trouble could be.

They fished one man out of the well and picked up the wounded one, and carried them both off to prison.

"Who caught them?" asked the people.

"We did," cried the boys, very proud of what they had done; "but we would not have woken up if our good Cocky had not crowed, and scared the rascals. He deserves half the praise, for this is the second time he has caught a thief."

So Cocky was brought in, and petted, and called a fine fellow; and his family were so proud of him they clucked about it for weeks afterward.

When the robbers were tried, it was found that they were the men who had robbed the bank, and taken a great deal of money; so every one was glad to have them shut up for twenty years. It made a great stir, and people would go to see Cocky and tell how he helped catch the men; and he was so brave and handsome, they said at last,--

"We want a new weather-cock on our courthouse, and instead of an arrow let us have a cock; and he shall look like this fine fellow."

"Yes, yes," cried the young folks, much pleased; for they thought Cocky ought to be remembered in some way.

So a picture was taken, and Cocky stood very still, with his bright eye on the man; then one like it was made of brass, and put high up on the court-house, where all could see the splendid bird shining like gold, and twirling about to tell which way the wind was. The children were never tired of admiring him; and all the hens and chickens went in a procession one moonlight night to see it,--yes, even Mamma Partlet and Granny Cockletop, though one was lame and the other very old, so full of pride were they in the great honor done King Cockyloo.

This was not the end of his good deeds; and the last was the best of all, though it cost him his life. He ruled for some years, and kept his kingdom in good order; for no one would kill him, when many of the other fowls were taken for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. But he did die at last; and even then he was good and brave.

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