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Gray Hen's Strategy

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"Wes," said Brown Hen, "Chicken Young is the sauciest chicken I have ever known."

"He has been away from under his mother's wing for so long," said White Hen, "that she has no control over him. He snatches worms from her just as he does from me."

"He needs a good lesson," said Gray Hen. "We let him do as he pleases. I've noticed he never takes a worm from the rooster."

The problem was that when Chicken Young saw a hen scratching for worms, he would wait for her to grab a nice, large one. Then, as the hen held it in her bill, he would sneak up from behind, snatch it, and run away as fast as he could. He seldom scratched for himself and relied on his cunning rather than labor.

The hens grew tired of his behavior and called a meeting to determine how to cure Chicken Young of this undesirable habit. They gathered in a corner of the yard, talking among themselves. Chicken Young observed them from his hiding place beneath a bush, unable to hear their conversation but certain that it concerned him.

"Let them talk," he scoffed. "I can run faster than any of them, and that's what matters. Besides, what's the point of scratching when those old hens already know where all the plump worms are? They should share with me once in a while."

However, Chicken Young would have been wiser to listen to the wise old hens instead of regarding himself as clever. Gray Hen had devised a plan to teach him a lesson.

"If we can obtain a piece of the clothesline, about the length of a worm," she suggested, "we can bury it in the ground. When Chicken Young is watching, one of us can scratch and pick up the rope. He'll pounce on it, thinking it's a nice, plump worm. Then we can laugh at him and ask how he likes a rope worm."



"Excellent idea," agreed White Hen. "Here comes the dog. Let's ask him to bite off a piece of the clothesline."

The dog found it amusing and quickly procured the rope for them. Later, when Chicken Young went for a walk down the road, the hens buried the rope.

Upon his return to the yard, Chicken Young noticed Gray Hen busily scratching. "She always finds a fat worm," he thought, sneaking up behind her. To his astonishment, he saw what appeared to be the largest worm he had ever seen dangling from her bill.

In a flash, he snatched it from Gray Hen, fearing she might chase after him due to the worm's size. Without hesitation, he swallowed it. However, the rope scraped his throat, choking him. He flapped his wings, stretched his neck, gasped for breath, and jumped around.

The hens hadn't anticipated him actually swallowing the rope, and they rushed toward him, appearing alarmed.

"Slap him on the back," instructed Gray Hen. "It's stuck in his throat."

"Shake him by the feet," suggested another hen.

After vigorous slapping and pounding, the piece of rope slid down Chicken Young's throat. Exhausted, he collapsed to the ground.

"I hope you'll be more cautious next time," remarked Gray Hen. "Look before you leap."

"Stolen fruits are not always the sweetest," added White Hen. "Perhaps you'll start scratching for yourself next time."

Chicken Young didn't respond to their comments but lay silently with his mouth open.

"He's young," said Gray Hen. "I'm confident he's learned his lesson. Let's take him to the water pan and give him a drink. That's what he needs."

Gray Hen and White Hen supported Chicken Young on either side and guided him to the water pan. After he had quenched his thirst, he flapped his wings and walked about, feeling himself again.

"You're all right now," assured Gray Hen. "Run around and stretch your legs."

With a crestfallen demeanor, Chicken Young walked away, and within a few minutes, they observed him scratching in a corner of the yard.

"I had no idea he would actually swallow it," remarked Gray Hen.

"Nor did I," agreed White Hen. "But he won't forget it easily, and it's just as well

that he got a good scare."

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