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The Lost Chicken

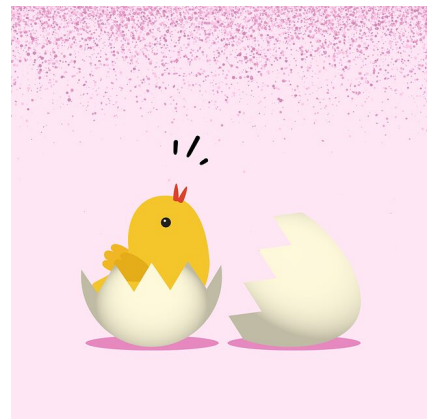
Emilie Poulsson

Peepsie was lost - Peepsie, the one little chicken which Mrs. Crackle, his mother, was trying to raise; and Mrs. Crackle was very lonely and sad. She stepped around the farmyard, lifting up her feet very slowly and looking in every nook and corner and calling, "Quack, cluck," in a loud, anxious way.

The old barn cat washed every one of her kittens over twice as soon as she heard the distressing news, to be sure that none of her babies was lost. The cows called their little bossy calves close to them, and every sheep sought out her own lamb, glad enough to hear it call, "Ma-a! Ma-a!" All the mothers told their children again and again not to stray away lest they should get lost, like poor little Peepsie.

In the meantime, Mrs. Crackle, having looked everywhere in the farmyard and having made sure that Peepsie was not there, started off to search outside. The first place to which she went was the hayfield. The grass was cut and spread out to dry. Mrs. Crackle thought Peepsie might be hiding under it, so she began to look and to call. There! What was that? Something moved, and Mrs. Crackle rushed after it. Was it her chicken? Listen and you shall hear.

Mrs. Crackle soon saw the little thing plainly as it went across a bare place in the field, and she immediately stopped running. It was a baby, surely: not half so big as Peepsie, however, and with a long thread of a tail stretching out behind it. "Why, it is only one of Mrs. Fieldmouse's children," said Mrs. Crackle in disappointment, and as she turned back to tell Mrs. Fieldmouse, she met that mother coming to find her child.



Mrs. Fieldmouse could not tell where Peepsie was but had seen a company of two-legged little folks going down the lane a short time before; so Mrs. Crackle thanked her and went on. The lane led past the orchard. Hark! Mrs. Crackle heard a faint cry. "Can that be Peepsie?" she thought, and into the orchard she went, guided by the sound.

There, under one of the apple trees, lay another baby; but this was not Peepsie either, although it had feathers and a bill and two legs, and its chirp still sounded

something like Peepsie's to Mrs. Cackle, even when she was so near. But when this baby moved it hopped on both legs at once, while Peepsie, of course, used his legs quite properly, one after the other.

Mrs. Robin, the baby's mother, circled watchfully around while Mrs. Cackle stood near the little one. "Peepsie lost?" chirped Mrs. Robin when the poor hen told her story. "Oh, how worried you must be! But I am sure he is not in the orchard, for my mate and I have been about here all the morning, teaching our little ones to fly, and we should have seen him."

Poor Mrs. Cackle decided that she would go on farther down the lane to look for her stray darling, and the happy Robin family continued their flying lesson, though Mrs. Robin felt very sorry about Peepsie and kept a sharp lookout for him.

Down the lane went Mrs. Cackle, but before she had gone very far she met Mother Duck. Now Mother Duck had gone out so early from the farmyard that she had not heard of Peepsie's being lost, and when Mrs. Cackle told her she said: "Alack! Alack! But perhaps, friend Cackle, your Peepsie has been with my children this morning. I'll call the whole company here, and you may see for yourself." So Mrs. Cackle looked at all the long train of little folks which were following Mother Duck. One by one, they filed past her, but she knew at the first glance at each one that it was not Peepsie, for instead of Peepsie's sharp-pointed bill, Mother Duck's children had broad, flat bills which Mrs. Cackle thought must be very difficult to eat with, and instead of pretty, slender, separate toes useful for scratching, these little folks had their toes joined together by a sort of skin, and then they walked so awkwardly - at least, so Mrs. Cackle thought.

"My Peepsie is not there," she said to Mother Duck. "You are sure, are you?" replied the Duck, "because if you are not, we could go to our pond, and then we could tell, for all my own children can swim, and I believe yours are like yourself - very timid about water." Mrs. Cackle was sure, however, so she said "Goodbye" and "Thank you" to Mother Duck and turned back toward the farmyard, while Mother Duck and her family went to their pond. "For," said the web-footed mother, "the very sight of a hen always makes me feel so glad that I can swim! I want to get into the water immediately and enjoy the use of my powers."

Unhappy Mrs. Cackle returned to the farmyard more worried than when she had started out. She now felt almost certain that some harm had happened to Peepsie. At the farmyard gate, however, she saw the farmer's little girl coming toward her.

Little Bess stooped and put her hands to the ground, and out ran the lost Peepsie - a bit frightened but not at all hurt. "There's your baby, Mrs. Cackle," said Bess; "I took him into the house for a little visit, but mother said you would be lonely,

so I have brought him back."

After that, whenever Peepsie disappeared, Mrs. Cackle used to go and cluck near the kitchen door, and then Bessie would let Peepsie go back to her, and Mrs. Cackle used to say to herself: "I do not wonder that she likes my baby, for when Peepsie was lost and I saw Mrs. Fieldmouse's child and Mrs. Robin's and Mother Duck's, I certainly found that there was not one of them like mine."

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