

A PLACE IN THE COUNTRY

Mama said the chickens were going to go live on a farm with other chickens where they would be happy. I think that's a good idea because those chickens were getting mean. Jimmy and I hadn't given them a lick of attention for a long time, and maybe Mama was right, chickens didn't like the idea of being pets.

It wasn't like that at the beginning. I remember when I picked out the pretty little chicks at the farm and garden store. Little bundles of fuzz, so cute, I swear it was like Christmas morning and a double scoop of Rocky Road all rolled up together. I was playing at Leesa McGillicuddy's house and her father asked if we wanted to go pick out a chick for Easter. Leesa and I started jumping up and down and squealing with joy.

"Thank you Daddy. You are the greatest Daddy in the world," Leesa said as she leaped up and down in happiness.

"I want a little pink chick," I said.

"I want a blue one and a green one," Leesa said.

"Tillie, do you need to go ask your Grandmother if it is okay for you to get a chick?" Mr. McGillicuddy asked.

"No, it's okay. I don't need to ask," I told him. Although if I had to ask Mama, I know the answer would be no. But I was at my Grandma's house, and she let me do anything I wanted.

My Grandma and Grandpa were my Daddy's mom and dad. I didn't see them as much as my Mama's mom and dad, Mama Lillie and Papa, but I liked staying at Grandma and Grandpa's house because they let me run around the neighborhood. My brother Jimmy and I went to Mama Lillie and Papa's house every day after school. Both of my parents worked and Mama Lillie took care of us during the day. She didn't let us go play with other neighborhood kids, but Mama Lillie and Papa lived in the country, and there wasn't many other kids around. They have a garden where Papa grows corn and peas and squash and watermelon.

Papa used to raise chickens. One time, when I was little, Papa cut off the head of a chicken, and the chicken ran across the yard without his head. I was real little when that happened and I thought the chicken was funny. Papa said he'd been raising chickens since he was a little boy and sometimes they did that. He thought it was just a normal thing.

Mr. McGillicudy was usually real quiet. I had never heard him say anything before today so it surprised me when he asked about the baby chicks. Normally, when I went to Leesa's house, he just sat at the kitchen table and drank coffee with Mrs. McGillicudy. Both Mr. and Mrs. McGillicudy are older than Mama and Daddy. They have gray hair and act more like Grandma and Grandpa than Mama and Daddy. Mama says Leesa was an "oops" but I don't understand why Mama says that. Leesa is a friend of mine and she is not an "oops". I think Mama is mean to say such a thing about Leesa.

Murray Hill Farm and Livestock was close to my Grandma and Grandpa's house and we didn't have to spend much time in the car. The store was old, with wooden shelves filled with bags of feed for all sorts of animals. Leesa and I picked up a bag of chicken food because the little chicks would need to eat something. I don't think they can eat people-food like dogs can. Sometimes I feed my dog Spot at the table and Mama gets on to me. She says people-food isn't

good for Spot and he'll get fat and unhealthy. But he really likes people-food and I think it's unfair not to feed him. Grandma feeds her dog Gracie people-food. When Grandma cooks bacon and eggs for breakfast, Gracie gets a plate of food too. She even butters Gracie's toast.

Mr. McGillicudy asked where the chickens were and the clerk led us toward the back of the store. The baby chicks were in pens that were kinda like my bedroom drawers where I keep all my clothes, pajamas, and underwear. The clerk pulled out a drawer and it was filled with tiny baby chicks, all of them fuzzy, making cute chirping sounds. I just wanted to pick one up and snuggle it to my face to feel its softness.

"Where are your pretty colored chicks?" Leesa asked.

"Do you have any pretty pink ones?" I asked, looking at the different pens for the colored chicks. All I saw were some yellow ones, brown ones, black ones, and reddish ones.

"Sorry girls, we don't carry the dyed chicks," the clerk said.

"Oh darn," I said. "I really wanted a sweet little chick."

"Me too", said Leesa. "Can we get one anyway?" She asked her Daddy. "Please."

"I don't see why not," Mr. McGillicudy said.

"What kind of chicks are these?" I asked, pointing to the fuzzy reddish-brown ones.

"Those are Rhode Island Reds," the clerk said.

The Rhode Island Red chicks looked good to me. They were cute little things, fluffy brown, and they came from Rhode Island. Rhode Island sounded like a sophisticated place and I'm sure these were special chicks. I was lucky to be able to get one.

“Go ahead and get two,” Mr. McGillicuddy said. “One will be lonely if you don’t”

“Okay. Thank you,” I squealed, and picked out two. The clerk put them in a little box for me.

Leesa picked out a yellow one and a black one.

I left the McGillicuddy’s house and headed for my Grandma and Grandpa’s house. It was late afternoon and my Mama would be picking me up soon.

“Grandma! Look what I have,” I yelled, as I ran into the house holding my box of chicks in front of me.

“Hello Sweetie, what do you have there?” she asked.

“Baby chicks. Aren’t they the cutest things you’ve ever seen? They’re from Rhode Island.”

Grandma just stood there with a blank look on her face. It was almost like she couldn’t believe I had a couple chicks. She peered into the box and shook her head from side to side.

“I don’t know what your Mama’s going to say about this.” Grandma said. “Where are you going to keep them?”

“Maybe my room, until they get big, then the back-yard because we have a chain-link fence. Do you think the chickens will get along with Spot?”

Grandma just gave me a funny look and turned to go to the kitchen.

“Your Mama’s going to be here soon. Go pack your stuff because something tells me she’s not going to be happy.”

Grandma was right. Mama was mad.

I couldn’t believe she could get so mad over a couple of cute little chicks. She kept on saying “What are we going to do with them?” And then, she asked my Grandma, “How could you let her buy them?” I kept on telling her that they wouldn’t be any trouble at all. They wouldn’t take up much space in my room and Spot would be happy to share the back-yard with them. Mama gave me a stare, just like Grandma did, but then, the stare turned to a scowl, and I knew I was in trouble.

“She didn’t ask me,” Grandma said. “Mr. McGillicuddy bought them for her.”

Later that night, Mama was on the phone with Mama Lillie, and they were talking about my chicks. Papa was going to build a chicken coop in the back yard and the chicks would live there. I would be able to play with them every day after school.

I was happy I would be able to see the little chicks almost every day. I thought they would be happier in their own chicken coop instead of a box in my bedroom, and maybe the back-yard wasn’t the best place either. Spot turned out to be a problem, too. When I showed the little chicks to Spot, he tried to bite them. I shut him out of my room, and he sat outside and whined.

Mama said she hoped the chicks were girls and not boys. Mama said boys could be a problem, and I agree with her. The boys at my school are a really big problem and I hate them all. I hope the chicks are pretty little girls and not nasty boys. Daddy laughed and said they

would both probably grow up to be bantam roosters and fight to the death. That made me mad because I didn't want anything bad to happen to my chicks.

I named them Sparkle and Fluffy. Sparkle was just a little darker than Fluffy, but I was the only one who could tell them apart. Papa told me I shouldn't name the chicks, but I don't know why anyone would have a pet without a name.

The chicks grew into chickens. Jimmy and I played with them every day after school, but they never learned their names, wanted to cuddle, or came to us when we called them. We had to chase them around the back-yard, and as they grew, they became harder and harder to catch. Now, when we catch them, they peck at us. The bigger they grew, the harder they pecked, and the worse it hurt. Now, Jimmy and I don't want to play with Sparkle and Fluffy anymore.

Sometimes we don't go say hello to them all week. When we do go out to their coop, they don't act like they're happy to see us, or even know who we are.

Papa said the coop was getting too small for the chickens and they needed to go. That's when Mama told me the chickens were going to go live on a farm. I was happy for Sparkle and Fluffy and hoped they would like their new home, even though they hadn't been very nice to me recently.

That was a couple of days ago. Papa said he took care of the chickens and Mama shook her head and said that it had to be done. I agree, the chickens would be much happier running around with other chickens, scratching the ground, and maybe, when they get bigger, laying eggs. I noticed the chickens were gone as I ran past the coop during a game of tag. Jimmy and I played outside most of the afternoon and I was happy when Mama Lillie called us in to eat.

Today is Sunday and Mama Lillie is cooking a family dinner. She set the big table in the dining room and loaded it with my favorite foods; mashed potatoes with gravy, green beans, macaroni and cheese, and fried chicken.