

Chapter one

It was terribly cramped in my cage. There were two other hens in with me, always shoving and pushing and pecking, and pulling out my feathers. Always irritable.

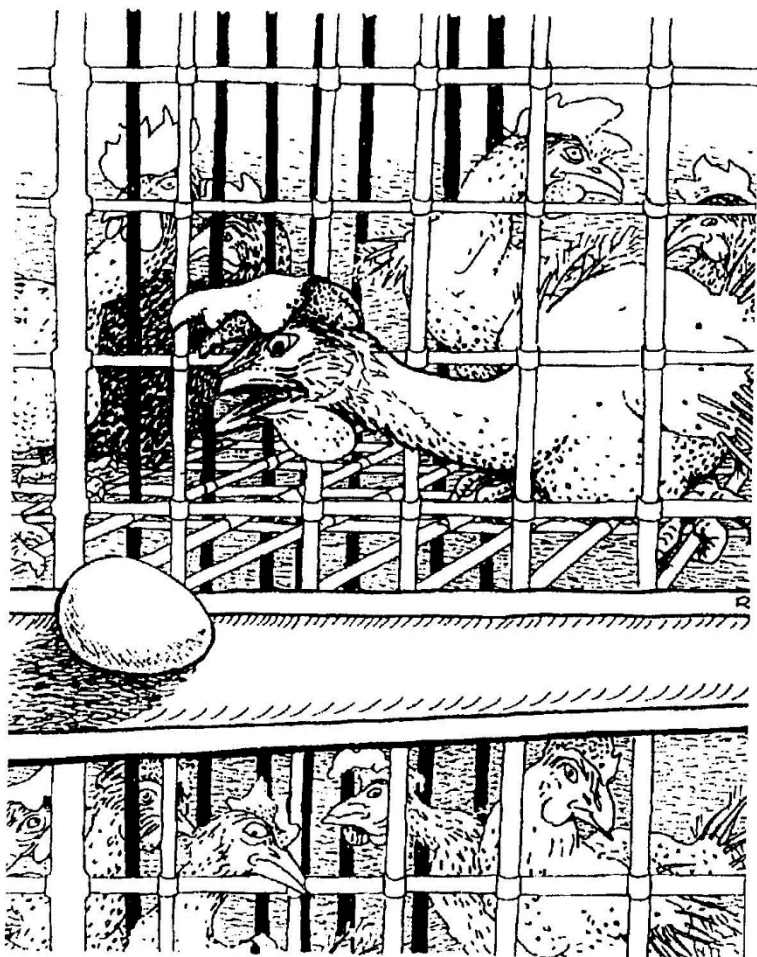
Not that I was a saint myself. I pecked them right back and sometimes I clambered over them too, to get to the food in the front.

For a whole year I'd been stuck in that horrible wire cage with those two petulant birds. I nicknamed them Moaner and Muddlehead. They called me Quizzie.

There were thousands of us in the shed, all in wire cages, row upon row, all stacked on top of each other.

Our tempers got particularly bad when it came to our daily duty to lay an egg. The trouble was, there was no place to hide an egg in that cage. And there was something in me which said that eggs should be hidden – somewhere safe, somewhere cosy.

But our eggs just rolled away once we'd laid them. Down the wire they rolled. I often poked my head out between the bars and craned to see where my egg went to.



Chapter three

We finally came to a stop and the little girl carefully lifted me out of the cage. She carried me quite a way, tucked under her arm. Then she bent to put me down.

I looked around to see what I was standing on. The ground was brown. It felt knobbly beneath my feet. Next to me a clump of green grew. I took a few pecks at it.

“Let’s go and get her some food and water,” the little girl said to her mother, and together they went off, leaving me alone.

I looked again at the soil. Nearby it looked softer. More powdery. I was fascinated. I longed to go and wallow in it. But how was I to get there? Clambering, I knew. Pushing and shoving and pecking, I knew. But walking forwards is something I hadn't tried in all my time in the battery. First, I lifted one leg, and put it down. Then I lifted the other. But both legs just came down in the same spot as before.

Slowly, slowly I got the idea. I began to put one foot in front of the other. I reached the soft soil and let my body rest on it. It was warm. I moved my body from side to side.



Where, oh where?

Then I crept into the crevice made by a bale of straw leaning against the wall. It was quiet and dark in there.

I nestled my body down so as to make a hollow in the bits of straw that had fallen onto the floor. Down and down and from side to side. I felt the lovely softness beneath me.

My headache was gone. In fact, I think that making my nest was the most wonderful happiness that I'd experienced in my whole life.

I sat there in the darkness, feeling quite brilliant. To think that I'd made my first nest!

I thought of poor Muddlehead. Poor Moaner. I would have shared my nest with them if they'd been with me now. After a while I laid my egg. I wouldn't have minded if it had taken me all day.

Then I got up to inspect it.

Oh! I could hardly believe my eyes! How beautiful. How smooth it was. What a perfect shape. What a delicate colour. And it was not rolling away to disappear from sight!

If only I'd known all this time how beautiful my eggs were, I'm sure I would have been kinder to Muddlehead and Moaner.



I jumped out of my hiding place and scuttled out of the stable door. I had to tell the whole world. I wanted everyone to know. And how I cackled!

Gabrielle came running. "What a commotion, Goosie," she said. "Have you laid an egg?"

She glanced around the stable, then reached into my hiding place.

In her hand she held my gift to her. "Thank you, Goosie," she said.

Later she came down to sit on a log and share her sandwiches with me. Peanut-butter and jam became quite my favourite.

"This'll put the feathers back onto you, Goosie," she'd say, breaking off a piece of her sandwich and holding it out for me to take. And she was right. Gradually, as the days and weeks went by, my feathers began to sprout again.