FINDING YOUR FLOCK

A COMING OF EGG STORY

Story and Illustrations by
PAM BAREN KAPLAN

FINDING YOUR FLOCK

Copyright © 2026 Pam Baren Kaplan

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Author-Drawn Illustrations (“Chicken Scratch-ins”) by Pam Baren Kaplan © 2026
Published by Paws to Celebrate Publishing

ISBN: 979-8-9983279-0-2

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Printed in the United States of America.

DEDICATION

For my sister, Lisa:
My partner in Yolklahoma,
My sounding board,
And forever part of my flock.

I know you've had your wing in this all along.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication iii

Meet Valor ix

Chapter 1 — The Chick That Looked Up 1

Chapter 2 — EB Finds His Flock… Party of Two 5

Chapter 3 — Time Flies But Chickens… Not So Much 11

Chapter 4 — The Truth Is Up There 17

Chapter 5 — First Day Photos. 23

Chapter 6 — Thundercluck 29

Chapter 7 — Shove-Off 37

Chapter 8 — Becoming 43

Waterseals 43

Maroons 46

Chapter 9 — Learning To Trust 49

Chapter 10 — Foggy's Mission of the Heart Finding Grace. . . . 53

Chapter 11 — Promise For The Future 63

Chapter 12 — What A Maroon 67

Chapter 13 — Looking Toward New Horizons 75
The Chick Who Looked Back 75
A Place to Belong 76
The Perfeggly Imperfegg Chick 77
The Horizon Comes Home 78
The Next Hatch. 79
Chapter 14 — In A Yolklahoma High 81
Double Date 81
The Already Answered Question 83
The Planner 85
The Event 86
Chapter 15 — Icy Blues 89
Chapter 16 — Cracking The Ice 97
You Matter 97
Best Layed Plans 99
Great Eggzspectations 101
Chapter 17 — The Build 103
Chapter 18 — Hatching 111
Chapter 19 — I Am. 117
Chapter 20 — Home Coming 125
Chapter 21 — Scramble 129
Chapter 22 — Plan D. 133
Chapter 23 — United 139

Chapter 24 — Flocked 145
Ta-Da! 146
The Pinch 148
The Reveal 149
Chapter 25 — Found 151
The Ceremony 151
The Reception 153
Looking Up 154
A Word from Valor 157
Yolkaleze Guide 159
A Note from the Author 175
Acknowledgments 179
About the Author 181
A Little Color From the Eggosphere! 183
Come Join the Flock! 185


HIYA!

MEET VALOR

My name is Valor Yadoneyetz (pronounced Ya-dun-yets). In my culture, Valor means strong and snarky.

I will be your guide as you travel to your destination…

Yolklahoma.

As your guide, I will appear when I feel it necessary to translate their language or socio-egganomics. And if you are really confused, don't panic. There's a Yolkaleze Guide at the back of the book to help you translate the local cluck. You're welcome.

This is self-determined eggucation. That means restroom breaks are up to you, but we do ask that you raise your right antennae prior to departure.

Snarks are permitted, and sharing is highly encouraged.

I am an insectoid. I don't bite unless you bite first.

This mission we are about to undertake is of extreme importance to the Eggosphere: to spread kindness, respect, and unconditional love.

Therefore, I, Valor, your A.U.L.K.R.—Ambassador of Unconditional Love, Kindness, and Respect—will be accompanying you on this journey.

Please buckle your seat belts. We anticipate smooth sailing.

I said *anticipate.*

CHAPTER 1



THE CHICK THAT LOOKED UP

EB. Full given name, Eggs Benedict.

His mom adoringly called him… “My Little Brunchman.”

EB was just a chick, a hatchling so to cluck.

He was different from the other chicks. He was absolutely over the moons with the sky.

The deep mysterious navy-blue night sky, to be specific. So many pretty sparkles emitting a celestial glow, reminding him of one of Mom’s delicious ooey gooey cupcakes sprinkled with sugar.



He sighed with emotional hunger. “I feel like a piece of my heart is calling me home.”

He longed to be a part of what he came to know as “The Eggosphere.”

He had heard that word on some sciency TeeWee show he watched with his family before their usual Sunday night favorite, The Egg Sullivan Variety Hour.

That was an okay program, but this show… EB never sat so still as he did when devouring every single word the narrator spoke, in fear that he’d miss the most important thing…

That the Eggosphere is real!

What the cluck is going on up there?

Is there life like us in this vast blanket of silvery stars?

He was so eggcited; he stammered to his dad, “Pop! Pop! Pop!!! This is amazing! Do you realize that there may be chickens like us, or kinda sorta like us? Maybe they have three eyes and their beak in the back of their head, and maybe, Pop, maybe they can fly! I mean really fly! Not like our embarrassing little puff-fluff in the air for a second… but soar!!”

Dad just smiled and sighed. “Kiddo, I doubt that very much, but you have fun flinkin’ bout that.”

Pop’s disinterest didn’t deter EB’s quest for answers. In fact, his obsession grew so much that he spent all of his free time learning as much as he could about his Eggosphere.

He didn’t play with the other chickens.

They didn’t want to play with him because all he squawked about was the Eggosphere.

EB tried to encourage their interest by telling them, “There’s life in the sky, living beings that might be just like us! That would be so totally yolk!”

EB didn’t want to play sports or even go fwimmin’ in the community bird bath. Nope, his mind was set on, as he called it, “The Up There,” the big blue ocean of the sky.

The neighbor chicks laughed and thought he had cracked his shell. They made fun of him and called him the odd little egg head. It hurt his feelings, but he was determined not to let it bother him.

EB looked up into the cozy night. He knew, he just knew that there was more to life outside of Yolklahoma.

“Odd Little Egg Head,” he groused.

“I’ll show them one day! I don’t need those guys! Not even one single feather’s worth!”

He understood that he wasn’t going to be that popular rooster in the neighborhood. Not a baseball star, just a guy who was in love with the stars.

The teasing was never going to stop, and he might just have to accept the role of solo eggventurer.

Hmmmm…

Or does he?

CHAPTER 2



EB FINDS HIS FLOCK... PARTY OF TWO

EB stretched his wings in the warm summer sun when he heard some voices coming from a few coops down.

He recognized those voices all too well. He felt a familiar quiver run down his spine, but today there was a difference.

For once, these voices weren't directed at him. Someone else was at the receiving end of those bully taunts.

He felt relieved… for a moment.

His curiosity was pecking at him.

Who is today's target?

He got up from the gravel and followed in the direction of the dreadful cackling.

It didn't sound good.

His brain couldn't help wondering who was getting the wrong end of the fish stick.

If I get too close, I might be dragged into whatever mayhem is taking place.

What do I do?

He approached as quietly as a chunky little chicken could.

He slowly peeked through the tree branches and saw the whole mess.



Those lame-brain geese were throwing rocks at some lanky little chick!

Were those tears he saw?

Is this what I look like when those jerks start on me?

EB couldn't stand seeing this. He had to do something. Something brave! Something courageous!

"Where is this brave talk coming from?" he asked himself.

At that moment, a rock hit the little guy on the butt.

He cried even harder.

The bullies laughed.

"Hey, weird egg, you gunna run home and tell your mommy?"

That was the last straw.

Before he took his first step, he contemplated his move. Knowing these dunderheads, they'd pull him right into a royal poop storm.

He swallowed hard.

His little feet scratched at the dirt, trying to find the courage he wasn't sure he had.

He took a deep breath.

He pushed away the branches of his hideout and mustered up a yell that seemed to come from some deep, dark, demonic dimension…

"You big, fat, ugly, stinky geese… Leave! Him! Alone!!!"

They whipped their heads around and saw EB.

A not-so-nice smile stretched across their grimy, dirty faces.

“Look, guys! It’s the Odd Little Egg! We can have a twofer!!! Two weirdos at one time! Let’s get them!!!”

EB ran toward the crumpled-up, sobbing chick.

He grabbed him by the wing and let out a booming battle cry.

“Let’s fly this coop, kid!”

And they ran.

Faster than a fart that Pops would try to wave away before you could smell the stink… quicker than a grub-chip ice cream cone that melts on a Yolklahoma summer day!

They dusted those guys!

Both breathing in near-gasps, they stood there, not knowing whether to cry or laugh at the conclusion of this traumatic encounter.

Turns out, a bit of both was appropriate.

They stood there silently, looking at each other for what seemed like the incubation period of a brood of 111 dozen eggs.

EB was still slightly panting for air when he said, “If only we had the ability to fly up into the Eggosphere and vanish!”

Foggy’s eyes opened wide. “The Eggosphere?” Did you just say… Eggosphere?”

EB, a little cocky, said, “I sure as shell did!” He extended his wing to shake Foggy’s. “I’m EB.”

“I’m Foghorn.” He mildly blushed.

“But you can call me Foggy.”

The rest of the day was an eggventure into the lesser-known world of friendship. They talked and talked about stars and other fantastic worlds.

But what glued that bond between them was when Foggy asked EB, “Do you think there’s life up there? Ya know, maybe like us?”

EB stopped in his tracks and started a little Yolklahoma wiggle in excitement.

“Finally! Someone else who gets the ‘Up There’! A kindred chicken!” EB shouted. “What a day this has become!”

“Hey, Foggy, what would you say if we came up with a super-duper, tell-nobody secret thingy only for us eggzplorers?”

“You mean somethin’ like this?” Foggy asked, demonstrating a tribal-like dance, twisting and turning, flapping his wings in the air.

“Yeah, like that, but maybe a little more butt bump! I like that wingy thingy!” EB laughed.

And so it was, right there in front of their own two beaks, the first-ever super-duper, tell-nobody secret called…

“The Wingy Thingy.”

As they were walking back home, EB said, “I just hope I can remember all the moves again.”

“Sure ya will, buddy. And heck, now you got me to remind you! See, it goes like this!”

Foggy attempted to recreate the moves, and he looked so totally ridiculous that they both burst out laughing until their giblets hurt.

“Ya know what, EB?” Foggy said quietly so no one else could hear. “You kinda sorta saved me from those goose butts…”

Pause.

“Thanks.”

It was a good day.

A great day!

Best ever!

“Can we do it again tomorrow? Just no geese,” Foggy assured him.

They shook wings on it.

EB watched Foggy walk down the road to his coop.

He thought, “Tomorrow those bullies might still be there. Tomorrow they may try to start picking on us again.”

For the first time EB could ever remember, he wasn’t walking home alone.

CHAPTER 3



TIME FLIES BUT CHICKENS... NOT SO MUCH

That first summer of friendship flew by.

Days were spent talking about the cosmos.

Afternoons disappeared in the library researching astronomy, while nights were devoted to staring into the "Up There," wondering about all the yet-to-knows twinkling overhead.

Their heads were so full they could have exploded!

They declared it had been the total funnest summer ever!

What made it even betterish was discovering that they'd be attending the same egglamentary school.

"Safety in numbers," Foggy reminded EB.

A smile, a wink, and maybe a little Wingy Thingy celebration. The two-wing bump, flap, then twist from left to right. They laughed until they couldn't flap anymore. Exhausted, they flopped in the grass, still gyrating like a pair of overeggcited hatchlings.

Wiping the dirt from his tail feathers, Foggy looked up. "Funny… time flies."

EB shrugged. "Too bad chickens don't."

They both laughed before heading home.

School was better than they thought it might be. There was still the occasional taunt from those dumbo geese, but together they managed to avoid being pummeled.

It was good.

One night, Foggy rushed to EB's coop, banging on his front door and ringing the bell, yelling, "EB!!! I've got something so outter space to show you!!! Open up already, you old capon brain!!!"

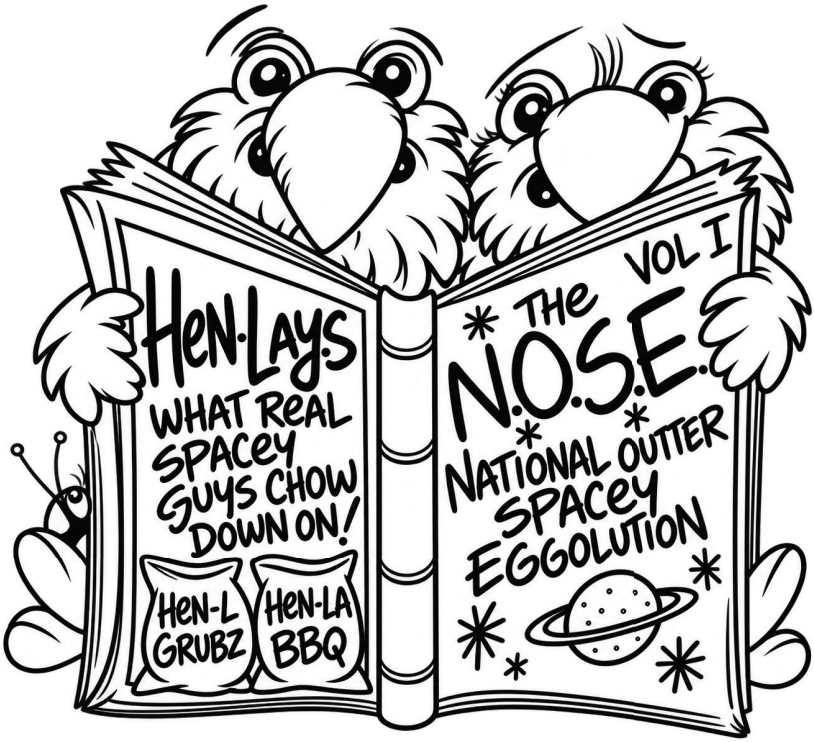
EB opened the door. "What's got you all clucked up?"

Foggy pushed a shiny, brand-new sciency magazine in EB's face.

"Feast your eyeballs on this! Smell that delicious ink! It's finally out. The first issue of *National Outter Space Eggolution*!" Foggy announced.

“The NOSE is out??? We have the first stinkin’ issue??? Let me see, I wanna see this, Fog! We’ve been waiting forever! Let’s go up to my roost and devour every morsel!”

They sat together, wing to wing, reading each word, ad, and story. It was like nothing else they’d ever seen.



It was also after their bedtime. Foggy quietly left the Benedict coop, promising that they would pick up where they left off at the next sunrise.

“See ya in a few, Ebbers,” Foggy whispered, and off home he ran.

This was to become the usual way of being for the space guys. Late nights, early mornings.

Anywhere they could learn more—extra classes, meetings—they just ate it up.

Foggy's mom, Eggalene, took them to the Yolklahoma Sciency Center as a surprise treat over the winter hollandaise.

It was so totally yolk, they nearly forgot to breathe.

"All these like-minded chickens in one place. Blew my gizzard away!" Foggy sighed.

EB shook his head in eggweement.

Funny how change isn't obvious until we take a good look at ourselves. The boys weren't just molting, they were maturing.

Foggy teased EB, "Uh, sir, take a look in the mirror. Your shorts are way too short, and your tail feathers are peeking out in back close to your butt!"

EB took a hard look at himself and acknowledged Foggy's observation.

"Yeah, the vet said I grew a foot! How the shell can that be? I only have two feet. Where's the third?" EB asked.



Foggy rolled his eyes and shook his head. “And you think you’re the smarter one?”

“And what about you, chubblers?” EB laughed. “You gained a couple of nuggets in your dark meat parts!!!”

It was becoming a no-duh that they were now young roosters, just in time as they were starting high school.

The next few years flew by.

Freshman year came and went with only a few minor explosions in the chem lab. Fortunately, no chicken was harmed.

Sophomore year, the uneggzpected happened.

A youngling approached them. “Are you two the space guys? I need eggvice,” said the chick.

Foggy fluffed up his eggo. “You’ve come to the right roosters.”

“The geese keep pecking on me! I heard they pecked on you too. How did you get them to stop?”

Foggy wrapped a wing around the chick. “Long story.”

EB smirked and said, “Which keeps getting longer and longer every time you tell it.”

Just then, the class bell rang.

“Find me after school. I’ll tell ya how we did it!” Foggy called as he hurried away.

EB laughed. “I’d buy a front-row nest for that one.”

Foggy grinned over his shoulder. “Whatever, smart butt.”

EB looked back at the younger chick standing in the hallway, still watching them leave.

Foggy whispered. “Do you realize what just happened?”

“Yeah,” EB said softly. “I think we became somebody’s Roos. I like it.”

“Me too, Roos. Me too,” Foggy agreed.

CHAPTER 4



THE TRUTH IS UP THERE

Semesters rolled by. Changes weren't measured in feathers or feet. They were measured in confidence. They were becoming, as Foggy proudly declared, "We're becoming real tough birds."

It was a Saturday afternoon at the library in the sciency department. They were doing a finals paper on eggstraterrestrial life. The question they would be discussing was:

"Would alien visitation have good advantages or bad advantages?"

They overheard a few giggles. A couple of chicks were squawking about David Duckovny and a new show on TeeWee called the Eggz Files about the paranormal and space.

“Para what?” asked EB.

“Para—NORMAL,” snickered that sassy chick Chickalee Poulet. “Try to keep up. I could strut around David Duckovny forever,” she swooned.

“Isn’t he the absolute rooster?” sighed her friend.

Both boys shook their heads, thinking, “silly chicks.”

But maybe… it would be worth a watch.

The following night, they got together for the premiere episode at Fog’s coop. Mom even made some candied corn kernels for snacks. She loved having EB over because he was truly her son’s good friend.

Not eggspecting much, they watched the first episode of Eggz Files. They were impressed, so much so that they watched the second and third episodes.

It became a weekly must-watch, followed by an in-depth, sometimes lukewarm debate post-episode.

Disclaimer: No feathers were crumpled.

This was no average TeeWee show. This was top omelet documentary.

David Duckovny was known to be quoted in any serious discussion the boys had. He was becoming a leader, highly regarded as an eggspert among these sciency guys.

Both EB and Foggy even sent away for a signed photograph from David to tack on their roost walls.

Serious stuff.



Back at school, Chickalee saw EB and Foggy sitting in the school feeder. They were having a hot debate with various students and faculty about Eggz Files.

The riveting question…

“Is Eggz Files a reputable documentary, or is it just a silly TeeWee show?”

Others were gathering around the table to voice their opinions.

“It’s a clucking TeeWee show,” laughed one of the dumbo geese guys.

"It's one of those mockumentary plots! It is not real, it's scripted, you egg heads!" said Vice Principal EF Young.

The crowd was heating up. Foggy poked EB. "Say something. You are the better public speaker and crowd control guy."

"I'll just go frozen."

EB stood and quietly addressed the crowd. His posture was upright and steady. He cleared his gullet and spoke.

"Fellow students… My colleague and I intend to demonstrate—with proper observation, logic, and scientific investigation—that there is considerably more above us than you are willing to believe."

At that moment, EB saw Chickalee standing in the crowd, her attention focused on his speech.

For the first time…

He noticed her.

He *really* noticed her.

He saw her in a different light, her feathers gleaming and so well groomed. Her eyes were like a Yolklahoma sunset. How did he never realize this before?

Like a jolt of electricity, he instantly gained confidence with Chickalee's admiration. His inner rooster was on fire, and he valiantly returned to his speech.

"Our mission is to prove that, without a shadow of a shell, there is so much more up there than you're willing to see! You are small thinkers, nothing but feathers between your ears. You'll see."

The crowd clucked in dismissal. The laughter faded as they dispersed. The only one left standing was the janitor, silently chirping as he swept up snack seeds and suet bar wrappers into the trash.

Chickalee went to put her little wing on EB's shoulder.

"Don't let those fools laugh you out of your dreams. Keep believing in what your heart tells you is true," she softly cooed. "The truth is up there, and I know you'll find it. I believe in you, EB."

"Thanks for the support, Chickalee," Foggy said.

Feeling like a beaten egg, EB smiled at Chickalee, grateful she had come to their aid. Grinning at her, he eggwees.

"I do believe that the truth is up there, Chickalee."

Strange thing, EB's heart felt a flutter.

He became light-beaked and dizzy.

Slightly alarmed, he turned to Foggy and grabbed him at the gizzard.

"Fog, my heart appears to be malfunctioning. I need you to conduct no fewer than these 111 tests."

Foggy gently laughed at his pal's overreacting and told him, "Roos, you're just fine, no worries."

He patted EB on the back to show his compassion because EB was the self-proclaimed smarter of the two, but Foggy was definitely the bigger softy.

The three walked out of school together.

As they reached the edge of the schoolyard, Chickalee slowed beside EB. This time, instead of simply touching his shoulder, she gave his wing a gentle squeeze before letting go.

Still confused about these new feelings…

He wasn't thinking about space anymore.

He wasn't thinking about documentaries.

He wasn't even thinking about proving everyone wrong.

He was thinking about Chickalee.

That seemed… important.

His heart fluttered again.

Curious, he smiled.

Whatever this strange new feeling was…

He hoped it didn't go away.

CHAPTER 5

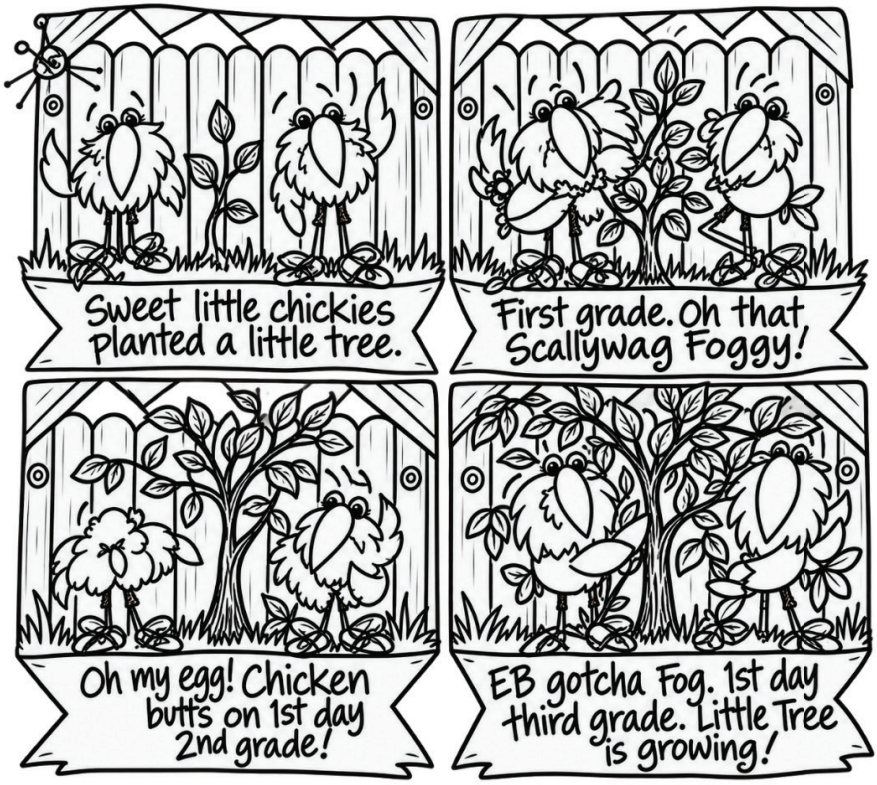


FIRST DAY PHOTOS

“What’s this? A family photo album? I love looking at pictures. Can I peek?” Chickalee asked Foggy politely.

“Sure you can. You’ll get a good look at your big, strong rooster of a guy when he was just a little fellow, knee-high to a grub!” Foggy said.

“Those pictures are from every first day of school, going back to Kiddiegarden through senior year.” Foggy laughed. “My mom used to take one photo of us on the first day of school. We groused about it every year, but it always turned into a silly gag and a lot of laughs. Hmmm, memories,” Foggy shared with Chickalee.


Sweet little chickies planted a little tree.
First grade. Oh that Scallywag Foggy!
Oh my egg! Chicken butts on 1st day 2nd grade!
EB gotcha Fog. 1st day third grade. Little Tree is growing!

EB tried to grab the photo album.

“Oh no, she doesn’t want to look at an ugly, skinny little chicklet!” said EB.

“Who you calling ugly? You were a chunky chicken…” Foggy teased EB.

“Come on, you guys. I want to see both of your baby beaks. You were probably so cute,” Chickalee replied.

Foggy laughed.

“Well, at least one of us was adorable,” he said, looking at his reflection in the mirror.

Chickalee took the album and sat down on the comfy perch, patting both sides for the boys to join her. Begrudgingly, they both plopped down and began the eggsploration.

The first photo was from Kiddiegarden, their first day. Foggy’s mom wrote a little note to capture the moment:

Sweet little chickies planted a little tree.

Chickalee squealed with loving adoration.

“Look at the two of you! EB, you were so cute, I could eat you up! And Foggy, what a little sweet beak.”

Both boys blushed.

Page after page resulted in laughter and a few chirps announcing their adorability.

Chickalee asked, “What are you doing in this one, Foggy? Are you making bunny ears on EB?”

“No, not eggzactly… They were devil horns!” Foggy proudly explained.

Chickalee giggled at Foggy’s joy in getting EB all worked up.

“Yeah, and see that there… It’s me kicking him to cut it out.” EB smiled.

“Always the yolkster! This guy did something stupid every year.”

“Stupid? Me think not. Genius? Creative? It’s a tradition,” Foggy replied.

“One year, devil horns. Another, a butt shot. I could go on and on.”

“Unfortunately, I have to go home now. I promised to help my mom with some coop clean-up.” She sighed. “Walk me to the door, Ebblet.”

Foggy shot a look at EB.

“Yeah, Lover-Roos, walk Chickadee out.”

EB, all pink-feathered face, took her by the wing and walked her out to say goodbye.

Foggy, being the pain in the wattle that he was, called out in a high-pitched, overly feminine voice, “Oh, hurry back, my little Ebblet! I can’t live without you!”

“Very lame and humorless,” EB said. “What’s up with you?”

Chickalee laughed as Foggy was just being Foggy… ridiculous, but his best-buddy self.

EB wrapped her in his wings and asked if he would see her tomorrow.

With a big smile, mocking Foggy, he said, “I wouldn’t have it any other way, honey bunny, because *I* can’t live without you.”

Chickalee held him tight and laughed.

After a sweet peck on the beak and a playful tail-feather pull, he watched her walk down to where she lived.

He was missing her already.

How was he going to manage leaving for service in a few days and being without her?

He was feeling sick in the gizzard.

He made a promise to Chickalee that he would write her every day.

Twelve-page letters, if not more.

He intended on keeping his word.

The sky was hosting that beautiful Yolklahoma sunset, his second favorite time to look up there. It was a splash of blues, purples, and a deep yolk-yellow orange.

Usually, EB looked up and wondered about what was beyond the clouds. Tonight, he found himself thinking about what was right beside him.

Chickalee.

Somehow, in just a short time, she had become a part of his sky.

The thought made him smile…

And then made his gizzard tighten.

For the first time in his life, he had something that he was afraid to leave behind.

“Hey, Lover-Roos, you coming back in?” Foggy yelled from his window.

EB smiled up at his goofball pal, remembering how many times Foggy's mom had yelled those words from a window.

"I'm comin', Ma!"

In just a few days, everything was going to change.

He just didn't know how much.

CHAPTER 6



THUNDERCLUCK

EB noticed something odd about Foggy's behavior. He seemed kinda outta the carton.

"What's up with you today? You've been acting strange all day," EB questioned Foggy.

"You nervous about the service?" he chuckled.

"I'm okay. I'm okay, and okay is okay enough for now," Foggy mumbled.

EB raised his feathered brows and eggcepted his buddy's weirdness for the time being.

Foggy threw a down pillow at EB's head.

It caught him right in the comb.

"Pillow fight!" EB shouted.

It became an intense battle of the Roos!



Pillows were dropping like bombs, back and forth, until…

One broke open.

"It's a down-feather snowstorm!" Foggy shouted.

The room was filled with feathers.

Two disheveled roosters were now throwing whatever loose feathers they could get their claws on.

The laughter was non-stop.

“I won!” declared EB.

“Did not!” chuckled Foggy.

Both boys took a breath.

Then the room went silent.

Foggy cleared his gullet.

“Uh, Roos, there is something I need to tell you…”

Foggy’s sentence got interrupted by a tap, tap, tap on his window.

Both boys whipped their heads around at the unexpected noise.

An unembodied voice beckoned them.

“Come out here, you guys! I need to talk to you!”

Foggy sheepishly stammered, “Uhhhhm, uh, hmmm… that’s what I needed to talk to you about, Ebbs.”

EB stared out the window.

“What the shell is that? It looks like a tree, It is a tree!!!”

“Yeah, buddy. It’s time to dust this one off and tell you all about…”

Pause…

“Little Tree.”

“Come on, you two dumbos! I need you to come outside… quit goofin’ around, NOW!”

“That’s, that’s Little Tree?” asked EB, who couldn’t believe his own eyeballs.

He motioned with one wing held about twenty-two inches from the ground, reflecting how not-so-big Little Tree once was.

Foggy grabbed him by the neck fluff and said, “You heard the tree, Roos. Let’s go.”

EB was babbling as they went outside.

“What da? I don’t think I like this… this is crazy…”

Night was falling, dark blue, and the stars were gently sprinkling the sky.

There they stood, two roosters looking up at a big, not-so-little tree.



“Did you tell him?” Little Tree asked.

“I was just about to when you came dancing in,” Foggy unhappily replied.

“Tell me what?” EB demanded.

“When did this happen? When did he start talking? When? This is a total thundercluck!!!”

EB jumped in with, “That’s Little Tree?”

Foggy shook his head.

“Affirmative.”

“And now he talks?”

“Affirmatively affirmative.”

EB blinked once.

Twice.

Little Tree poked Foggy with one of his branches.

“Foggy.”

Pause.

“It’s time.”

After clearing his gullet, Foggy began, “Okay… here goes… Little Tree was Chicofied. Jeff had put him up for Chicofication as a gift to you and me for all the years he spent standing up with us, supporting our decisions and ideas. I asked Jeff to do this sooner, but he was backlogged, and it finally went down yesterday.”

“And now you two are telling me? Wait a second! Hang on… You and Jeff were planning this… just the two of you?” EB reacted.

“Well… Little Tree had a say in it too.”

LT, as they had come to call him over those speechless years, shook his branches in eggweement.

“Plus, LT was perfectly content to wait. And there’s one… more… little detail.”

EB interrupted. “Don’t tell me. He can fly!”

EB continued to rant. “Oh no, chickens can’t fly, but Chicofied trees can??? Isn’t that just ducky!”

“No, no, no, silly. Trees can’t fly… at least not that I know of!” Foggy said, looking at LT for validation.

LT shook his trunk from side to side.

“Nope. Never thought about that.”

Foggy took a deep breath.

“LT and I have been talking since the day we planted him that first morning when we started Kiddiegarden.”

EB stood open-beak.

“How? I never heard. He never spoke to me.”

“It was through our thoughts,” LT said.

“We could hear each other’s thoughts.”

“But why not me too?” EB asked sadly.

EB felt hurt, like the third egg to hatch out of three.

“Rules,” sighed LT.

“Until I am Chicofied, the rule is that only one non-rooted soul can hear me. Foggy was chosen because he is eggstremely sensitive and needed a task to help him, well… mature.”

“But, but…” EB stammered.

LT sat on a bump on his trunk.

He put a branch around EB’s shoulder, then explained, “You were both instrumental in my Chicofication training. The only difference is that Foggy would translate my tree-words into Yolkaleze out loud so you could understand what I was saying and still keep to the rules. Then Foggy would flink all of your thoughts to me. It worked. It was never meant to hurt you.”

Pause…

“You guys are my best friends.”

“Roos… in the beginning, I thought that most everybody talked to trees. Plus… I was sworn to double-dirt smack my grandma’s chicken-butt that I couldn’t tell anyone. It was so hard keeping this from you,” Foggy apologized.

“And… look at us now!” exclaimed LT, sounding distressed.

“We are all so much bigger. I’m a feather over ten feet tall! And the worst of it all is that I am being ruthlessly teased by the Shady Gang. They keep calling me Little Tree, itty bittle tree. It’s embarrassing, guys. I need your help, please?”

“Flinkin… Flinkin some more…” Foggy mumbled.

EB announced, “Okay, I got it! How’s about we change your name? The rules say that once a guy gets Chicofied, he’s been transformed! It’s like a benefit, ya know? A total yolk thing to do!” EB suggested.

“He gets benefits! I heard you’ll get a free year subscription to Better Homes and Branches!!!”

“How do you feel about… Murray?”

“No,” Little Tree frowned.

“Melvin?”

“No.”

“Okay… how’s Isadore?”

“Not an ice cube’s chance in shell!!!” LT quivered.

The boys asked impatiently, “Well… what would… you like to be called?”

A pause.

A deep breath…

And a little leaf rustle…

“Lance.”

“Lance?”

“Yup.”

“Really?”

“I always felt like a Lance.”

Foggy shrugged.

“Settled then… Okay, Lance.”

Lance stretched his branches toward the stars and released a great big…

Burp!

“Now then… we got some doin’ to do.”

CHAPTER 7



SHOVE-OFF

Every Yolklahoman knew what came after graduation.

Shove-Off.

It wasn't joining the service. It simply *was* the service.

Every newly graduated Yolklahoman chose where they would spend the next chapter of their lives…

The Maroons…

OR

The Waterseals…

Only one realm remained untouched.

The sky.

Not because it wasn't needed… but because chickens simply weren't built to fly. It had always been this way.

EB chose the Waterseals.

Perfect motivation. He wasn't choosing water; he was choosing the closest thing he could get to the sky.

Foggy…

Foggy liked his feet on the gravel.

He happily selected the Maroons… and what a Maroon he was destined to be! This was where his boots and his heart belonged, firmly on the gravel.

For the first time since Kiddiegarden, the two best friends knowingly chose different paths.

They promised to write every day… then amended it to once a week… hopefully.

Bags packed, it was time to shove off.

But first, EB needed to take care of one very important introduction.

There was someone who would become a soft haven for his girl while he was gone.

It was time to meet her new support system…

Chickalee was waiting for EB to come outside.

“There’s someone I want you to meet,” he told her.

EB waved a wing at a very tall tree.

Chickalee squinted.

“EB, why are you waving to a tree?”

“That’s not just any tree. In fact, you already know him. You just don’t recognize him being all Chicofied!”

“Little Tree???” Chickalee could not believe her eyes.

“Allow me to re-introduce you to Lance, formerly known as Little Tree.”

“Lance?” she asked.

EB shrugged.

“Yup… Lance. He picked it. Go figure.”

Lance tenderly wrapped a branch around EB and Chickalee.

“I’ve watched you two grow together. It is an honor and a privilege to finally tell you myself how much I admire you two as a pair. Makes my bark all giddy!”

EB explained, “Chickalee, Lance will be here to keep you company, have long talks with you about me. He’s been a lifelong friend, a silent one until recently. And when I come home, it will be you… me…”

“And Lance your tree!” sang Lance.

“Oh, and of course, Foggy too.”

“Group hug!” shouted Lance.

This embrace would go down in history as the wackiest foursome photo Yolklahoma had ever seen!

Then EB gave Foggy the poke of celebration… their lifelong tradition.

“A wink! A smile! Let’s shake some tail feathers, Roos, and Wingy Thingy!” they cheered in unison.

Laughter erupted… not only from the boys, but from friends and family joining in the Wingy Thingy dance.

Everyone was flapping and flopping and wingy-ing it out!

As eggzaustion kicked in, the boys embraced.

It was a tight hug with a couple of wet feather faces.

“Love ya, Roos,” Foggy said, full of pride.

“Love ya, my brothah from another hen. Be safe.”

“No, you be safe.”

“Oh no, you!”

“Uhn-un you!”

Neither boy wanted to be the first to let go.

Egglyn Krenshaw lovingly pulled them apart.

“Okay, one last time before you goofs leave. I’m getting my new timer camera out so we can all be in the picture.”

Egglyn placed the camera on a tall surface, set the timer, and ran behind EB and Foggy, pulling Chickalee with her.

Lance jumped in as more family and friends joined the scene.

Ten, nine, eight, seven… counting down until…

Two…

One…

“Everybody, devil horns!!!” yelled Egglyn.

Flash!

Click!

“We finally gotcha!” Egglyn laughed as she squished her son good-bye for now.



Foggy looked at her softly and squished her right back.

“Love yous, Ma!”

Another page in the family album had just been hatched.

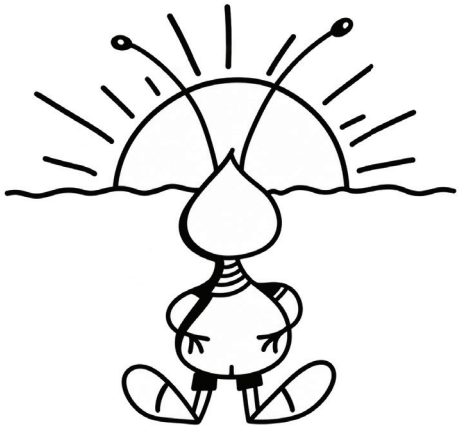
Egglyn would put a little note right below the picture…

The bestest group photo ever!

Truth be told… the funniest part of that photo?

Lance’s branches made the devil horns behind everyone’s heads!

CHAPTER 8



BECOMING

Waterseals

Less than 15 minutes after boarding his ship, EB realized he had made two terrible discoveries.

First, he missed Chickalee so much it hurt from comb to claw.

Second, he was seasick. Very ungood.

If he was going to be a successful Waterseal, he had to get used to being on water.

EB looked around the ship. Roosters were hauling gear, calling to one another, and finding their places.

Where was his place?

For the first time since he could remember, Foggy wasn't nearby.

He suddenly wished his lesser half was standing beside him.

"Great… now I'm seasick and lonely."

And then he really felt it…

The ship rocked back and forth… then up and down. That rhythm, back and forth, up and down, was making him queasy.

"I shouldn't have eaten that mealworm and cheese omelet before shipping out. Bad choice. Very bad choice," he muttered.

He was getting a terrible case of head fluff. He leaned over the rail of the ship and out came the return of that morning's omelet.

"Oh, Roos, you look green! You never been on the water before? Are you seasick? We gotta get you some sea legs pronto! I got just the remedy," said a big, winged, muscle-bound rooster.

EB looked up at him.

"Help, please. Anything," he weakly squeaked.

"Okay, this is what ya do. First, you gotta roll over on your side. Then take your left wing…" he explained to EB as EB tried to follow his instructions.

"Now, buddy, that left wing goes over your beak. Right, right, you got it… And now your right wing gets tucked underneath your tail

feathers. You're doin' great! And now… get on both your knees… And say a prayer and let loose the gosh dang biggest fart ever!"

EB was on his knees, looking at this rooster with repulsion in his eyes.

"Do it, Roos. Trust me! Promise… you will feel better!"

As if a sign came by special delivery from the Eggosphere above, the biggest, loudest, and stinkiest omelet-smelling fart was released from EB's bottom end.

"Whoa, Roos! That is the worst!" he laughed.

Others were surrounding him, laughing until they almost hatched an egg.

"The old seasick fart trick! Never, well, almost never fails!" he smiled broadly.

EB was never so embarrassed, and in front of all these service roosters he didn't know.

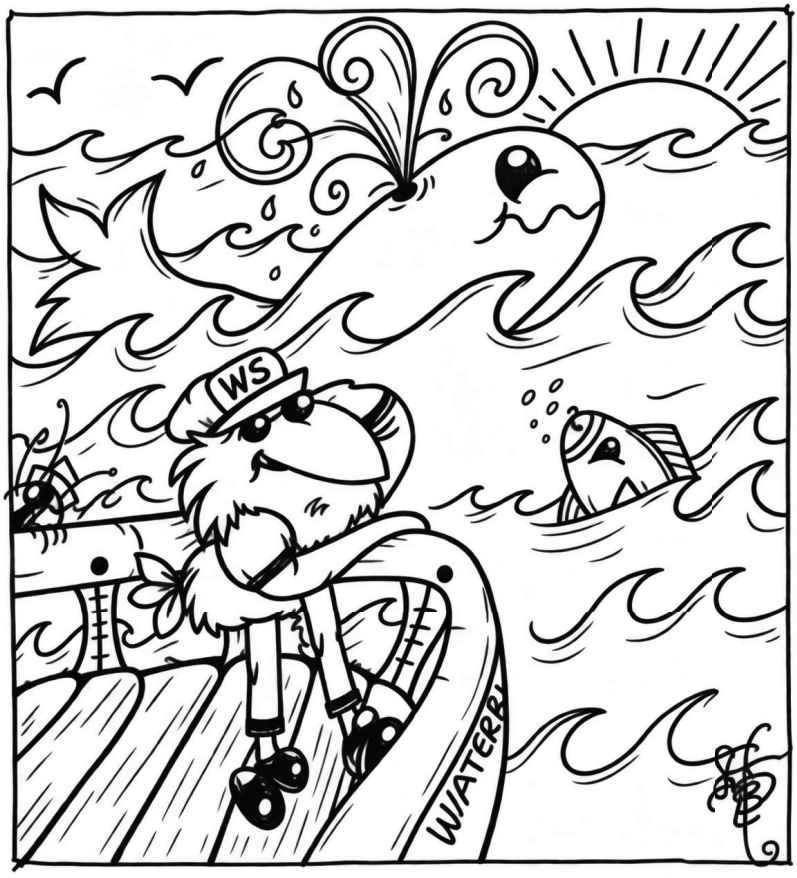
The rooster grabbed him by the wing and pulled him upright.

Oddly enough… he actually did feel better.

"I'm Jack," he said, introducing himself. "Jack Goolet. I think you and me are gunna be pals. You got a good sense of humor. I think. You haven't clobbered me yet!"

"Still time," EB groused. "I'm EB, and don't worry. I won't slug you for pullin' this stunt on me. At least not now."

EB didn't know it yet, but the sea had just introduced him to a very good lifelong friend.



Maroons

Foggy thought about his decision.

It sure feels strange without my Roos here with me.

Pause…

“But I couldn’t put one foot on a big floating metal wash tub like he did! Not sturdy enough,” he said aloud, stamping his feet on the ground.

Eggsack strapped to his back, he met his Maroon platoon for the first time.

The guys were friendly enough. He even recognized one of them from back in high school.

He walked up to him and gave him a wing bump, acknowledging their acquaintance from school.

“Todd, you old capon! Good to see you,” Foggy said.

“You as well, Fogster. Where’s your lesser half, Benedict?” he asked.

“He went Waterseals, and I wanted both feet firmly planted on the ground. I guess a chicken has to do what a chicken has to do.”

Todd shook his head in eggknowledgment.

Todd and Foggy met the rest of the platoon, especially their commanding officer, Sergeant O’Cluck.

He was a short, stocky, no-nonsense guy with tiny little wings and a loud, scary voice.

“Attention! Line up, beaks forward! Drop and give me 111 pushups, followed by 111 sit-ups, then 111 flaps around the field! Hup2!!”

Todd moaned.

“I want my mom!”

“I’m sweatin’ soup already, and we haven’t even begun!” Foggy grumbled.

This was going to be a long stint in the Maroons.

He wondered how EB was doing.

I hope he’s having an easier time adjusting to the service than I am.

He was missing his Roos.

Before the first day became the second, the ground beneath his feet would begin shaping him into something stronger than he ever imagined.

CHAPTER 9



LEARNING TO TRUST

Back home, Chickalee was staring out her roost room window, day-dreaming about EB.

She let out a long, lonely sigh.

I miss him so much.

Flash!

A familiar branch appeared outside her window.

“Did I just hear a Yolklahoma sigh? That’s my usual cue! Your Uncle Lance has arrived! What’s up, chicken pup?”

One look told him everything. Her feathers drooped, and tears still clung to her cheeks.



He rested a gentle branch on her shoulder.

“I know you miss that big knucklehead of a chicken. I do too, but in a different sort of way.”

“He is going to be gone for such a long time, Lance! What am I going to do until he comes home?” Chickalee moaned.

“Hmm…” Lance thoughtfully crossed his branches.

“Flink, flink, flink…” Lance pondered.

“I’ve got it! We write a musical called EB Off to Sea the World.”

He grinned.

“See? Sea?”

She couldn’t help but smile a tiny bit. “Not my style,” she confessed.

“Hmmmm…”

“Then maybe we bake him one of my grammy’s favorite forest recipes. I know just the one…”

He paused dramatically.

“Mealworm Multi-Grain Chip Muffins with extra yolk protein! And we could ship them to him!”

She shook her head.

“No?”

“No.”

Neither idea hatched.

Lance scratched his bark.

“I’m kind of stumped.”

He waited proudly.

“You know…” He grinned. “…because I’m a tree.”

She rolled her eyes. “Lance.”

“Okay, okay.” He chuckled.

Then his voice softened. “You know what I flink?” he asked.

She looked up.

“I flink you’ve been asking the wrong question.”

“I have?”

“You keep asking how *you* are going to get through this.”

He paused.

“The question is, how are *we* going to get through it?” He smiled. “I made a promise to EB, and I made one to you. Trees don’t run away. We stand stoic through sunshine, through storms, and through every leaf-color-changing season!”

He gave her a little nudge.

“So, you’re stuck with your old Uncle Lance until your boy comes home. Maybe we should consider a little retail therapy?”

For the first time since EB had left, Chickalee laughed.

A real laugh.

She took a long, cleansing sigh and looked out toward the distant horizon.

“I’m ready to move forward.”

Something was growing alongside the ache in her heart.

Trust.

Not only in Lance, but in herself.

Maybe waiting wasn’t the absence of courage.

Maybe waiting was its own special kind of courage.

CHAPTER 10



FOGGY'S MISSION OF THE HEART FINDING GRACE

Foggy was on his third training mission, and something surprising was happening. Each hike seemed to get a little easier.

The trail no longer felt like something he had to conquer. It felt like the place where he belonged.

His legs burned but it was a good kind of burn. The kind that whispered, "You're getting stronger."

"I like it. In fact, I love the outside! I love every little living soul in nature!" he announced.

He thought about EB…

He wondered how EB and the sea were cohabiting these days. He had such a good laugh reading his last letter…

Only EB could survive nearly puking overboard and somehow make it a comedy!

They were four hours out on training. O'Cluck called a break as they approached a small village.

"Good enough place as any to stop, get some grub, and make camp in these here woods."

Todd helped Foggy pitch their tents and afterward decided that some grub was an eggcellent plan.

The village was small: little diner, post office, school, business or two and… an ice-skating rink.

"That's kinda weird," both agreed.

They peeked inside and saw a couple of young chicklings and what seemed to be a teacher moving across the ice in itty bitty chickie struts.

They were cute.

"Roos, I'm starving. Let's go get some food and nest a bit," Todd suggested.

Foggy was never one to turn down a good grub burger. And this wasn't gunna be a first!

After a couple of root beers, made with real roots, claimed the menu, Foggy said, "I'm gunna go walk off this burger. You comin', Todd?"

Todd declined. "Goin' back to camp. I'm beat; see ya there, Roos!"

Foggy stepped out of the diner. He stretched his long, now getting muscular legs and looked up.

It reminded him of EB.

"The old Eggosphere… wonder if EB is looking up at it right now?" He felt a connection to his buddy. It felt good.

Foggy heard voices coming from outside the skating rink. It was the cackling of a small group of hens.

Foggy watched as they went inside.

He followed until he reached a window where he could better see what was happening.

"It is beautiful watching these skaters," he thought.

Then…

He saw her.

She glided across the ice so effortlessly that for one second he wondered if she was really touching it.

She spun.

Once, twice, three times!

Foggy's eyes couldn't keep up.

"Whoa… that got me dizzy!" he said out loud.

She was so graceful.

He marveled at the way her wing feathers sparkled in the light.

He was about to turn back to camp when one of the girls came out and saw him watching.

Foggy turned a deep shade of embarrassment pink for getting caught.

Just then the other girls were leaving.

“Hey, chicks! We have an audience tonight!” she teased. “He’s kinda cute, dontcha flink?”

All the girls laughed.

Embarrassment pink returned once more.

The laughter faded.

Foggy quickly walked ahead.

“Ignore those silly hens,” the voice behind him whispered.

Foggy turned.

It was her.

“Excuse me… are you a Maroon?” she asked shyly.

“Uh, why yes, ma’am, I am,” he politely replied. “I’m First Chicken Maroon Trainee, or FCMT Krenshaw.”

He stood tall like a good Maroon should.

“And you can call me Chickadee.” She smiled.

“Miss Chickadee, may I walk you home?” Foggy asked.

“I was hopin’ you would.”

They walked side by side until they arrived at her coop.

"First Chicken, have you ever skated before?"

"No ma'am, never."

"How's about you come on by tomorrow and I'll teach you?"

The thought of seeing her again was an answer to his hope, but he was on a training mission that was departing at 0800.

"Unfortunately, I am continuing on my mission at 8 a.m. tomorrow," he said with gruff sadness in his voice.

"Well… what if we met back at the rink at 6 a.m. and we could spend some time until you need to go?"

His heart was dancing.

Foggy would have done anything to spend more time with her, even if it meant sneaking away from camp at the break of an egg.

"I'll be there," he said, smiling a big, goofy grin.

Chickadee waved. "See ya then."

She held his wing momentarily and then went inside.

He felt the eggzact place where she had touched him…

He would not let that feeling go.

Foggy couldn't sleep a wink that night. He had to make sure that he was up and ready by 0600 to meet her.

He looked at his official Maroon time teller and it was barely 0500.

"An hour until I see her," he softly said.

Todd turned over in his sleep sack, opened one eye and saw Foggy awake and dressed.

“Roos, it’s only 5. We got plenty of time.”

“I need your help, Todd. Will you cover for me until we leave? Can’t explain now! I owe you big,” Foggy called out as he got his things in his Eggsack and headed out to the rink.

Foggy walked with a bounce in his strut, excited to see Chickadee.

The skating lesson. Well… not so much.

He was waiting on the ice rink steps when he looked up.

There she was. Just as beautiful as he remembered.

“Morning, Foggy. You ready to feel fantastic flying free as an eagle?”

He gulped. “But chickens don’t fly.”

“I do!” she proclaimed. “Have faith, Foggy, you can do this!”

She put her skates on first then helped him into his.

“Hold onto the rails until you get your ice feet.”

He tried to stand but wobbled back into a nearby perch. She held out a wing for him to hold.

Her touch was warm, even in this icy castle.

“On the count of three you stand, hold my wing…”

“Both wings?” he asked.

She smiled and grabbed him and counted…

“One… Two… Three!!! I gotcha, Fog.”

He was up, slightly diagonal, but up.

She celebrated his upwardness with a shout of joy. She began to move, still holding him. "Time to skate!"

Gulp.

"Don't. Let. Go!" he yelled.

She smiled with her whole being.

"I'm going to slowly set you free," she said.

"Ok, I can do this," Foggy stated confidently.

Wobble.

Wobble…

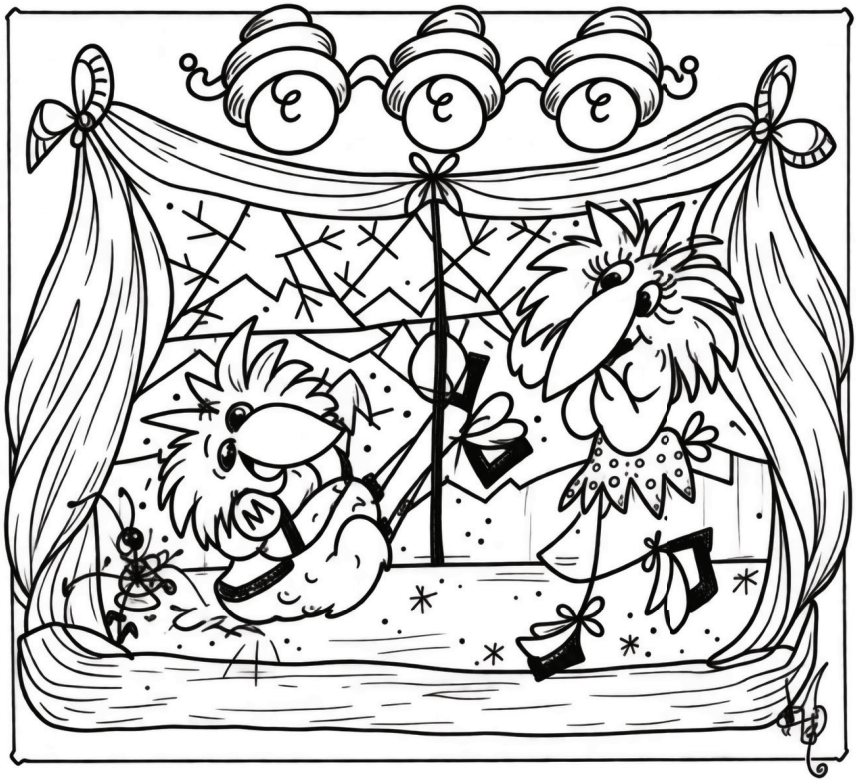
Yikes!

"I can't… do this!" he screamed as he slipped, both feet up in the air, and landed on his butt on the ice.

At first, he grimaced.

But then he laughed. He laughed so hard it hurt his bottom.

Chickadee laughed right along with him.



“You know what, First Chicken Maroon Trainee Foggy?”

“What’s that, Ice Princess?” he teased.

“I like you. You’re not afraid to try something new even if it might not work out. I think that’s admirable.”

“I like you too,” he smiled. “Will you skate for me? I want to see you prove that chickens can fly!”

She stood up and proceeded to skate as fast as her drumsticks could take her.

Both wings raised, she leapt into the air!

"You're flying, Chickadee!!! You ARE flying!" he cheered.

She flew into the air, then landed, followed by that circley twisty thing.

Once, twice… he lost count.

She came to a stop, bowing to him.

In awe, he looked at her and said one word…

"Grace."

Pause.

This time it was she who blushed.

"That's my given name, Grace. I never felt that it fit me…"

Deep sigh…

"Until now."

CHAPTER 11



PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE

"Mail call, Chickalee! Looks like your sweet chicken heart sent you a letter," announced Lance.

He branched the letter over to her.

"I'll leave you alone for a few, but no worries, I'll be back for all the juicy highlights later."

She held the letter as if it were the most fragile shell she'd ever seen.

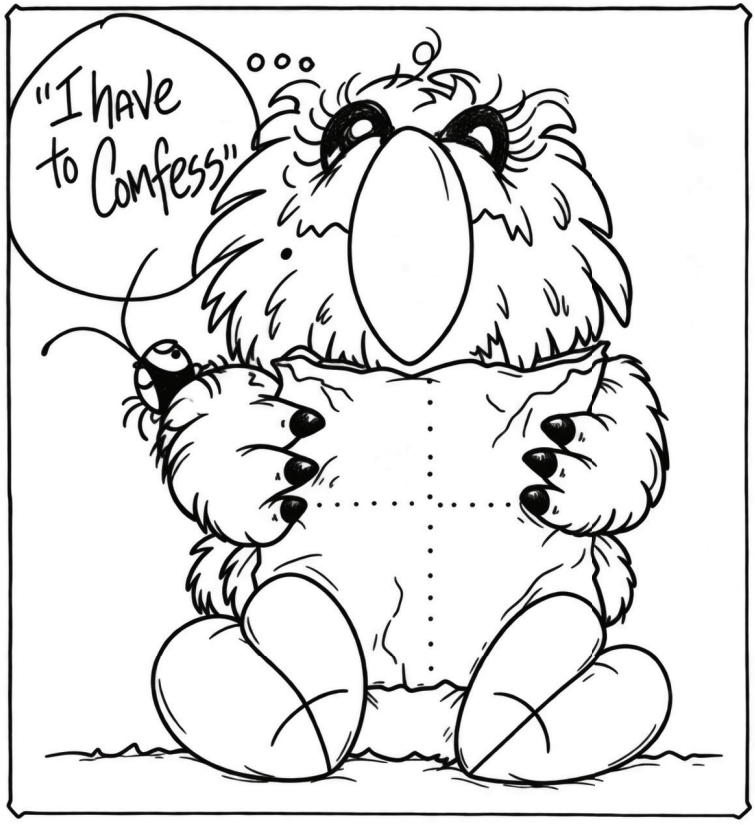
Why am I so nervous? Oh… I hope it's all good, I'm sure it is, I hope.

As Chickalee gently opened the envelope, she imagined hearing the soundtrack of an old thriller movie playing, “Tah Tah Tah Dah!”

She shook her head. “Okay, Chick, get ahold of yourself. You are acting a bit scrambled.”

She glanced at EB’s eggmanship. “Very neat,” she thought. “Just another reason to be proud of my rooster.”

She began to read; she could hear the words as if he were right there speaking them to her.



I miss you more than there are stars in the "Up There"! Just makin' sure you know. And I'm hopin' that you still feel that way about me too.

If I could make one wish right now, it would be that I was back home with you.

I have to confess something, CL. (EB's nickname for Chickalee.)

She realized she had stopped breathing at seeing the word "confess." Nothing good ever came from that word!

She apprehensively read on, praying he wouldn't drop an egg on her.

I never thought I'd say this, but I've found something more beautiful than the Up There… It's you, my baby chick. You are the most beautiful thing that has ever hatched!

She could imagine him getting all flustered while writing, then realizing how she might take his words. She smiled and missed him even more.

EB wrote on.

The ocean is magnificent. It's got a personality like the Up There, but different.

You can see movement—the waves, the ripples and splashes… it, it kinda speaks to me. "And the horizon! This is where the Up There meets the ocean. Breathtaking!

I can't stop thinking that one day you'll be standing beside me, looking out at the endless horizon.

> *I want us to have a boat of our own. I want to take you there so you can fall in love with it too. I miss you more than words can say.*
>
> *When I look at the ocean and realize how far away I am, I think about the day you'll be beside me.*

And he signed the letter:

> *I love you… until shell freezes over.*

Chickalee teared up.

She smiled because she knew it meant forever.

CHAPTER 12



WHAT A MAROON

Mission 11. This one was known as the most strenuous, hard-as-shell training eggility course.

All the Maroons were concerned, not worried. It's against the by-laws for Maroons to worry.

Truth be told, Foggy was a bit more than concerned.

He and his buddies nested together for support. Coming in first could mean a promotion.

Foggy wanted that, not just for himself, but for Grace to be proud of him. He knew she already was proud, but it never hurt to get eggstra.

Training was hard and the hours were long. He didn't get to see Grace as often as he would have liked. She understood his responsibility to the Maroons, and he loved knowing how proud she was of him.

Foggy was in the best physical condition of his life. He thought back to those old days when those dumbo bully geese picked on him and EB.

"I don't need them to see who I became. I know what I am!"

"Hang on, big guy. It's tomorrow at 0900. Pace yourself, Roos!" said Todd.

Foggy shook his tail feathers, trying to get "in the zone," as his commanding chicken, O'Cluck, always told the platoon.

"Get some shut-beak and be back here at 0800 sharp!" shouted O'Cluck.

Sleep didn't come easy. Foggy couldn't get out of his own egg. This was important. No failure, and especially not in front of Grace, who'd be in attendance.

Foggy heard a voice. He recognized it immediately and laughed.

"Is dat you, Lancey?"

"And what other Chicofied tree would be eggmotionally conversing with you? "I've sensed a lot of unneggessary anxiety emitting from your chicken brain. I'm here to remind you of who and what you've become.

Pause.

“Time for you to believe in you! Grace does. I do too! Now you do. That didn’t sound like I wanted it to, but you get my bark. You’re going to sleep now and wake up ready to do it… make it… I mean, succeed! I am rooting for you, Fog! Always have. Always will.”

Foggy woke up on time and ready.

He scratched his head. He sensed a familiar bark. The leaves were making a big commotion outside.

Wow, that was one odd dream… or was it?

He saw Grace on the sideline. She was his biggest support, and he was grateful to have her in his life.

He threw a wing kiss, and she caught it.

“Goodest luck, my love! I’m your cheer chick! Go get ‘em!”

Her words, and her being there, hit him like a bolt of egglectricity.

He was ready!

His platoon lined up, ready to take this test. A test for Maroon promotion.

It was so quiet you could hear a feather drop.

A loud, cackled whistle marked the start of the test.

They were off!

First was the Climb the Coop strength test. Some roosters didn’t make it.

Foggy? No problem.

He heard that voice again.

“Confidence, my friend. Believe in you!”

The Chicken Wire Balance was next.

This was a tough test to crack. He stood at the start, waiting for the whistle to sound.

“Go now, Roos!”

SOUND!!!!

He stepped forward onto the wire. It was sharp and spikey, but he was prepared with Maroon-regulation chicken-wire foot pads!

He wobbled.

He froze for what felt like forever.

“Confidence,” he chanted.

He regained his balance.

Wobble again.

“Breathe, Krenshaw!”

Back in balance.

Head held high, he heard her cheer.

“Foggy, you’re doin’ it! Almost finished!!! You gotz this!”



The next moment, he crossed the finish scratch!

He did it!

No cracking up!

He finished!

He felt relief.

It was over.

Foggy felt he had forged through a huge life accomplishment.

Grace was at his side. She was hugging him so hard that his fluff was flying all over.

He looked up at the scoreboard and stopped breathing for a second or twelve.

He had the highest score in the competition!

He wished his best buddy EB were there to see this.

Foggy tapped his right wing to his heart and said,

“To you, Roos, this win is for both of us!”

Foggy turned to Gracey and shouted over all the noise, “Do you see it, Grace Chickadee Sanderz? Look up there! I won!”

Grace shouted as loud as she could, “You were the winner in my heart long before you put one foot on the track!”

The crowd erupted, “Cheers for First Chicken Maroon Trainee Foghorn Krenshaw!”

Sergeant O’Cluck walked up to FCMT Krenshaw, who was standing at attention.

He silently raised the winning medal around Foggy’s neck.

For a moment, Foggy remembered his chickling days…

No self-confidence.

Bullied and afraid of way too much.

Not today, geese.

“I embrace who I am, and I’m likin’ it!”

Grace was clapping so hard that her wings hurt.

O'Cluck said, "Congratulations, Krenshaw. Or should I say, congratulations, now Promoted Maroon Krenshaw! And may I say, what a Maroon you've become!"

O'Cluck saluted once more.

Foggy returned the salute.

The crowd went wild!

Foggy faintly heard Lance's voice.

"I'm so proud of you, my best branch. I echo O'Cluck's words… And what a Maroon you are!"

CHAPTER 13



LOOKING TOWARD NEW HORIZONS

The Chick Who Looked Back

EB zipped up his Eggsack packed with a year's worth of personal growth, friendships, and a whole lotta sweaty underwear.

He stopped for a brief moment to reflect on where he'd been and where he was headed. A short time ago, he was a chick who looked up, but not so much today! He was leaving with confidence, friendship, purpose, and a deeper understanding of the horizon.

Oddly enough, was is going to miss the Waterseals. He realized just how much he loved the ocean, but home, that's where the heart is.

My heart. My Chickalee.

A Place to Belong

Foggy asked Grace to come back home to Yolklahoma with him. His eggcitement spilled like runny yolk!

"I so want you to see where I grew up, the people and place that shaped me. I want to share all my hijinks with you in the place where they happened! And you eggsolutely need to meet my BRFF. Best Rooster Friend Forever. I've known him since chickhood!

Foggy clucked on…

"Oh, and Grace, wait until you meet Chickalee, EB's girl! You two will be great friends, I know! Then there's Lance. He is a real goofball but a loveable one."

Foggy decides to save the Chicofied tree for an in-person introduction. "Bigger impact," he thought.

Grace's worries spill out.

"What if Yolklahoma is too big? I've never been to a big city like Yolklahoma before. What if I don't fit in?"

Foggy answered, "Not an ice cube's chance in shell! Yolklahomans are hatched around the rules of kindness. That's what makes us feel like we belong. And truth be told, Grace, that's why I fell in love with you."

She smiled at him and wrapped her wings gently around his neck, followed by a beak peck and hug to seal the deal.

The Perfeggly Imperfegg Chick

Chickalee is humming as she tried to distract herself from losing a feather, being so excited to finally see EB. She gave herself a little peck on the back for being a cool chick…but she was far from cool, not even coop temperature!

Maybe if I run through my chicklist, I'll get this fluff in order? Okay…

Salon?

Outfit?

Mani and feathercure?

She sighed.

Everything has to be perfect for his homecoming in two days.

CLUCK!!!! TWO DAYS???

After the mild feather disaster, Lance appeared at the window.

"Have no fear, my dear, I'm here! Why the waterworks?"

Chickalee blew her beak and dabbed the tears. "I need to look perfect for EB."

"Chickie, let me tell you something. When that rooster first sees you, it will be like he sees you as perfeggtion. That big egg brain loves and adores you! Nothing different, just the specialness of you!"

She quietly asked, "Do you really think so?"

"Uncle Lance says so! Let's wipe those feathers and go do some boyfriend commin-home retail therapy!"

"Therapy?"

“Shopping,” Lance replied.

Chickalee looked very confused.

“Never mind. Let’s just go!”

The Horizon Comes Home

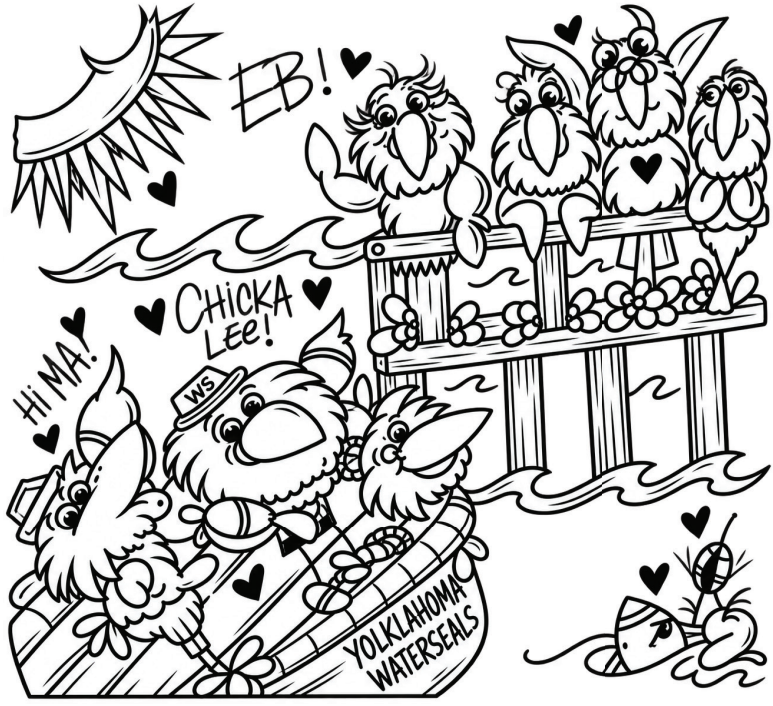
The return vessel approached the Yolklahoma dock. EB thought back to his Fart Trick remedy upon departure. He smiled.

That was pure Jack.

He could hear voices coming from the dock.

He heard her.

He saw her.



The moment was branded in his mind and soul.

Home. Chickalee. I'm home.

He ran to catch her in his now very big, roostery wings. They embraced.

They pecked. They laughed.

Through awkward, happy tears, they said at the eggzact same time, "I missed you."

Lance watched from the grass. A smidge of liquid love trickled down his bark.

"EB, my friend, some horizons are miles away. Some are standing right in front of you."

The Next Hatch

"What an amazing day," Chickalee told EB.

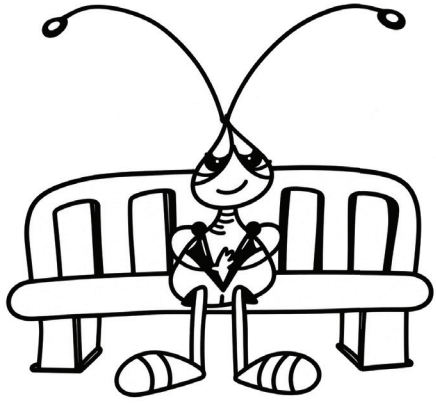
"I was flinkin the same thing, Chick. But that's so not the final hatch, noooo," he said to her.

Chickalee looked up at him inquisitively, waiting for the reveal.

"Foggy comes home tomorrow, and he is bringing Grace with him! He tells me that you two are gunna be as thick as chicks! And then we'll show Grace Yolklahoma and maybe go out to our favorite place on Main Street, Fowl Doin's. That chef Cookie J Childs does magic with Grub Parmesan.

"And then? Who knows. But I do know I love you, Chick…till shell freezes over."

CHAPTER 14



IN A YOLKLAHOMA HIGH

Double Date

All dressed in their finest feathers, EB and Chickalee were meeting Grace for the first time. All four were going on a double date.

Chickalee was excited to meet Foggy's girl. "I hope she likes me," she told EB.

"I wouldn't worry a feather or a drumstick about that. She sounds great. Did you know she skates?" EB asked.

"She what?"

“Skates, like on ice.”

“How in the shell does she do that?”

EB laughed and told her, “Great skater topic of conversation…hey, it could be your Ice Breaker!”

She rolled her eyes at EB.

That one hurt.

They meet at Fowl Doin’s, EB and Chickalee’s favorite restaurant.

“Good vibes,” EB explained. “Out of this Eggosphere Grub Parm, you gotta try it!” EB reported.

Foggy hugged Chickalee as they entered the restaurant. EB punched Foggy in the wing.

“Roos!”

“Guys, this is my Gracie,” Foggy said glowingly.

Chickalee grabbed her by the wing and escorted her to their table.

“I couldn’t wait to meet you! I’ve heard amazing things about you!”

Grace felt Chickalee’s warmth. A promise of a new relationship that would last a lifetime.

The clucking began. It almost seemed like it’d never stop.

Foggy smiled, looking at two of his favorite chicks. “And you were worried? You never needed an ice breaker!”

Clucking stopped.

EB looked directly at Chickalee and busted out laughing. “Ice breaker!”

Foggy and Grace looked a bit scrambled but joined in the laughing because that's what friends do.

As the foursome left the restaurant, Grace happily said, "Dinner was so eggcellent! I've never had Grub Parmesan before! It's a definite do-it-again, and soon!"

Unnanamoose Eggweement!

The Already Answered Question

Walking back, EB said, "Nice evening. I really like Grace."

"I do too. I can't wait until she and I can get some hen talk in! We're meeting at Starclucks Fryday for lunch!"

Chickalee continued to outline her plans with Grace while EB was focused on the next few life-changing minutes.

They came to a park bench. He stopped and cleared his gullet. He perched atop the bench, reaching a wing out to bring her next to him.

Chickalee looked at him.

This is what she wanted more than anything in the Eggosphere! She knew the answer even before he asked.

"Chickalee, I've loved you since the time you defended me about the Eggz Files. I've loved you since you first held my wing. I've loved you since I first truly understood what love means. Would you do me the honor of being my mate, my forever chick?"

She lovingly looked up at him.

"Yes, Ebblett, yes, until shell freezes over…and beyond."

He wrapped his wings around her and said, “You’ve made me the happiest rooster ever!”

He gently brought her down off the perch, and they walked home in blissful silence until EB said, “I am in a Yolklahoma high over you.”



She pinched his butt and laughed.

“Ouch! That hurt!” But he was smiling.

“Better get used to that, Roos. It’s just the beginning.”

The Planner

The date was set and the plans had begun.

The wedding planner called a meeting in the park at the now-infamous bench with the bride and groom.

EB said, “Lancey, what’s shakin’? Whatcha doing here?”

“The bride hired Uncle Lance to plan the Yolklahoma event of the year!”

“You did?” EB looks at Chickalee, surprised.

“Who else will have our best interests at heart? Plus, Lance knows a good time like nobody else! He really knows how to shake a leaf!” she said.

“All in favor? Say Eggwee!” Chickalee called.

“The three—two chickens and a tree—eggwee!” Lance said with a little trunk-shimmy action.



It was Fryday, and Chickalee and Grace were finally getting together at Starclucks for some long-awaited hen talk.

Chickalee and Grace had started growing together. Grace hugged Chickalee and told her, “I’ve never had a sister, but I bet you’d be the best ever!”

Chickalee started to tear up at hearing Grace’s sentiment.

“Grace, I would like you to be my Chick of Honor. Will you?”

Loud cackles of delicious joy!

“Oh yes, I’d love that! I’d be so honored.”

The tears began again.

“It’s getting awfully drenched in here, you two! I might be barking up the wrong tree, but I never do that! Did Grace eggwee to be…?” Lance asked.

“Yes! Yes, she did!”

“I did!”

“Now we can move ahead on the dress! Oh, your dress, Chick!” Lance started to get all sappy. “If you tell anyone I got all sapped up, I’ll deny it!”

Laughter and tears had never felt so right.

The Event

The entire town was invited to the wedding ceremony. EB and Chickalee wouldn’t have had it any other way. And when we say the entire town, that includes snails, ladybugs, bats, and everyone’s pets!

Even the town Welcome Sign would be in attendance!

Good thing they were getting married at the most loving spot in Yolklahoma: The Welcome Sign. So appropriate and romantic, plus a lot easier than digging up the sign and hauling it somewhere else.

It was a beautiful day. The sun was bright, the temperature slightly cool. The groom looked great, as did his best Roos, Foggy.

“Someday soon, pal, I hope I can do the same for you!”

Foggy smiled because he had his own plans planning.

The music began.

EB and Foggy stood under a tree filled with twinkling, delicate white lights. An eggshell-silver sash draped the tree in glory.

Then the bridal party commenced.

Ahhhs and *ohhhs* were heard as the bridesmaids and ushers passed through.

Then came the bride.

Chickalee was radiant. Her dress, her feathers—perfect.

As she walked down toward EB, he was bursting with love for her.

She looked into his eyes as they met, him taking her wing, she taking his.

“Dearly beloved,” came a familiar voice. The officiant turned to face the bridal couple.

“Lance?” EB asked?

“Lance?” Chickalee echoed.

“Formerly known as Little Tree Lance! I’m the tree who is a brother from another mother, to be exact!”

The crowd went wild.

Lance whispered, “Surprise, guys! I got ordained by the Worldwide Tree Ordainment Division just in time to hitch you two together! Isn’t this amazing?”

Lance looked at Chickalee.

“Do you take Eggs Benedict as your rooster?” Lance began.

Chickalee smiled. “I do.”

Lance turned to EB.

“And do you, EB, I mean Eggs Benedict, take Chickalee…”

Lance began to tear up. It was quickly becoming a full-blown sap.

“I’ve known these two since they were little chicklets! Oh, shell…”

Through his liquid love, he managed to continue.

“Well, do yous?”

“I do!” Eb and Chickalee said in unison.

Lance performed a beautiful service.

Foggy was the best-ever Best Roos. Grace was just that, pure grace as Chickalee’s Chick of Honor.

But Chickalee stole the show.

Never had Yolklahoma seen a more beautiful bride.

This would be the talk of the town for years to come.

CHAPTER 15



ICY BLUES

EB and Chickalee moved into a town coop near the park where EB proposed. It felt meant to be.

The newlyweds were getting used to being cooped up with each other. It was going to take some time to retrain EB to clean up the mess he made after grooming in the dust room.

Chickalee was telling Grace about what a slob he is! Little snips of feathers in the basin and on the floor. Roosters! But she loved every bit of cluck about him.

The girls had a good laugh about their messy roosters.

Grace became quiet. Chickalee noticed a ripple in her mood.

“Something on your mind, Gracey?” Chickalee asked.

“It’s really nothing. I’ll get used to it. I’m okay,” Grace sighed.

“Oh no, young chicklet, I think you’re keeping something from me. Spill, girlfriend.”

“I’m homesick. Don’t get me wrong, I love Foggy and you ’n EB. I’ve even learned to love Lance.”

Both rolled their eyes once around.

“But I miss the ice. I miss skating. I miss that crisp air in my feathers! I miss teaching the littles. It’s what defined me. It’s what made life so complete, that is, before Foggy. Yolklahoma is a great place, but it doesn’t have an ice rink.”

She sighed deeply.

Chickalee put a wing on her shoulder. She realized that her being there for Grace, being present, sitting with her to listen and understand is eggzactly what best chick friends do.

“Skating is a big part of who you are. It’s got to feel like you’re missing a piece.”

Grace was grateful to have someone who understood her. Chickalee was becoming the sister she never had.

“Maybe someday Yolklahoma will have a rink where I could skate.”

Little did the girls know, EB was in the other room and dropping his eaves on their conversation. He knew Foggy should know about this, and he decided he would be the messenger. It was what Roos did.

Quietly, EB tiptoed out so the girls didn't know he was there. He was almost 111% successful until he knocked over the wedding gift they got from the Con Pollos, some crazy pot that heated cheese. Think Chick told him it was called a Fon-Don't pot. Odd, but worth a try.

He managed to escape before being seen.

It's lucky those two are good cacklers, good 'n loud!

Foggy was in his garage puttering. Whatever that meant. He felt, as a grown chicken, he needed more puttering experience, a rooster thing to do.

When the day comes that I finally have my own coop to share with my love Grace…

Off in a beautiful daydream, he was interrupted by EB's surprise visit.

"Roos, we gotta squawk. Something's up with Grace, and I felt, as your BRF, you need to know."

"What does he need to know?" said a ten-foot-tall, uber-leafed tree known as Lance.

"What the shell? You guys startled me!" Foggy moaned at being pulled from the most beautiful daydream he'd had since the last one twenty-two minutes ago.

"Grace isn't happy!" EB blurted.

Lance raised his branches to his knot hole, aghast! "Whatever are you clucking about?"

Foggy looked dazed but mouthed, "Huh?"

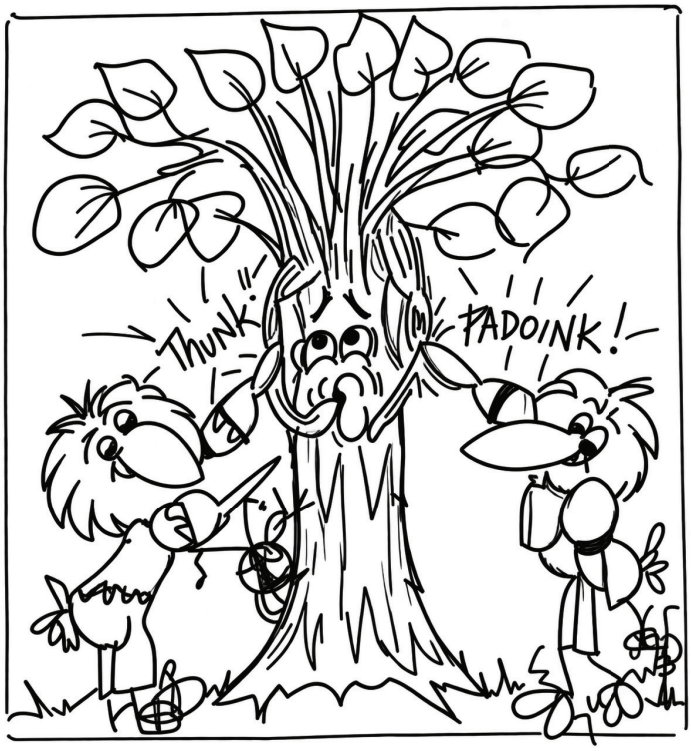
"Okay, you two branch heads, even though neither possessed even a twig, you get the idea," EB said. "Grace and Chickalee were at our coop squawking, and Grace told Chick that…"

Lance was shaking his entire body. "Uh-huh, yep, uh-huh. Why? I don't get…"

"If you let me finish, I'll eggzplain!" EB yelled. "She's homesick. She's really more ice-sick. Misses the skating in a sad way. She said it was like a missing piece."

"She's missing a piece? Piece of what? Wing? Shell no, not a drumstick, not the drumstick!" Lance stammered.

Foggy batted him up the backside of his bark, because everyone knew his bark was worse than his… never mind.



EB shared the rest of what he'd heard. "She's sad, Roos."

"What am I gunna do? Do you think she'll leave? I don't want her to leave!" He began to sniffle.

"The only one who might be leaving is me in a strong breeze!" shouted Lance, pointing his branch to the windy place up there.

"We need a plan," Foggy said to his guys.

After a lot of cratching heads and trunks, it hit him.

"I flink I got it, guys! I will build her the best ice-skating coop she's ever seen!" declared Foggy.

"I'm in; I'll help," EB said.

"I'll pitch in too!" said Lance.

The roosters looked at Lance, not so sure what he could manage.

Lance caught their confusion. "I'll do all the architectural drawings and supervise you two feather brains."

Two wings and a branch came together in a SLAP of eggweement.

"Now, do I tell her or surprise her?" asked Foggy.

"Knowing the female species as well as I do…"

Both guys cleared their gullets and giggled, hearing that ridiculousness.

"Here's how I see it. You have a choice… One…surprise her and sneak around and make her think you're strutting around…"

Both roosters shook their heads. "No way!"

"Or you can tell her and make her the happiest chick in town. She'll love it until… what did Chickalee say at your nuptials, EB? Till shells are frozen? I really don't get it, but…"

“Till shell freezes over! You overgrown stick!” laughed EB.

Never minding the rude interruption, Lance continued, “Plus she can assist me in the architectural drawings. So, which is it?”

“All together, boys.” Lance smiled.

“Tell her,” all three announced.

“Did you hear that harmony? The blending of our tones, we could be the next Yolklahoma Bark Band!” said Lance.

EB mumbled, “Oh shell.”

“I’ll tell her tonight, and we begin tomorrow. No time to waste. Gotta keep her here and happy!” Foggy proclaimed.

“Uh, Roos, one tiny little detail…where you gunna build it?” asked EB.

“Oh.”

Silence.

“I didn’t flink about that part. I can’t let this not happen for her! I can’t let her leave!” Foggy sighed.

Silence.

Flinkin.

“I’ve got it! I’ve got it! No worries, my little feathered goofs, Uncle Lance is here to save your sorry chicken-butts one more time!”

Lance proceeded to tell them about a sweet little piece of grass not far from where the boys originally planted him. His great, great, very great grandma Elma left it to him before she was mulched.

“Good old Elma,” Lance reminisced. “It would be a privilege to gift it to the future home of the Lance Forest Ice Skating Coop!”

Silence.

“I may be a tree, but I have roots. I have a history. I have something to give.”

“Wow. I don’t know what to say, Lance. She’s gunna be over the moons. Can we ponder on the name for a spell maybe?” Foggy pleaded gently.

“A spell is just what you may need, and I know a Wicken Chicken that can stir up one shell-of-a-soup to solve this teeny obstacle,” said EB.

“There is no obstacle here!” Lance stated as he crossed his branches over his trunk.

“We are building the Lance Family World Famous Intereggospheric Ice Stadium right here!” he announced, as he stomped on the chosen pile of dirt.

“Oh tweet, what are we getting ourselves into?” Foggy asked.

“Gracey will be able to hold his branches back…I hope,” mumbled EB.

Foggy pondered then smiled…

“I don’t have to ask Grace to fit into my world. I can help build one where she belongs.”

CHAPTER 16



CRACKING THE ICE

You Matter

Foggy looked into Grace's eyes and smiled. "Do you know what I've never noticed before?

She looked up at him waiting for him to finish his thought.

"Your eyes are the same blue color of your ice back home."

Grace began to tear up. She sniffled and put her wing around him.

"What did I say to cause those tears?"

“You know how much I love you, don’t you?” she asks.

“I could be a smart-butt rooster but I don’t want to ruin the moment. Yes, my love, I do,” Foggy said.

“I love it here but I’m feeling a bit...”

Foggy interrupted, “Ice-sick?”

“Yes, yes, that’s it eggzactly! I so hoped you’d know! And you do, I feel almost guilty having these silly feelings. Everything here with you, Chickalee, and EB is more than I could ever ask for!”

“Your feelings aren’t silly one bit. I fell in love with that graceful skater whose given name is Grace! That’s no coincidence! But I need to diseggwee, my Gracey. I am going to give you a little more than you’ve asked for, maybe way more.”

She looked at him bewildered.

“We, meaning me, EB, Lance, and you are going to build a Yolkla-homa skating rink!”

Her eyes grew as wide as goose eggs. “Whaaaaaaat? Where? How? For me? Whaaaaaaat?” She was trying to catch her breath.

He proceeded to tell her all about their plans, the land Lance donated, her intimate involvement in the building ideas and to work alongside the architect.

“Are you the architect?” she inquired.

He smiled. “No, that’s not my chicken house, but I can tell you, I’ll be there doing the work, EB too.”

“Who’s the architect?” she asked, a bit afraid of the answer. “Oh no, you’ve got to be yolking?”

Foggy shook his head, and a feather drifted to the gravel. “Yes, the self-appointed architect, Lance.”

“Oh, shell.”

“Oh, shell is right.” Foggy laughed. “It will be fun! It will help the community; you can teach again! You can skate any time you want!”

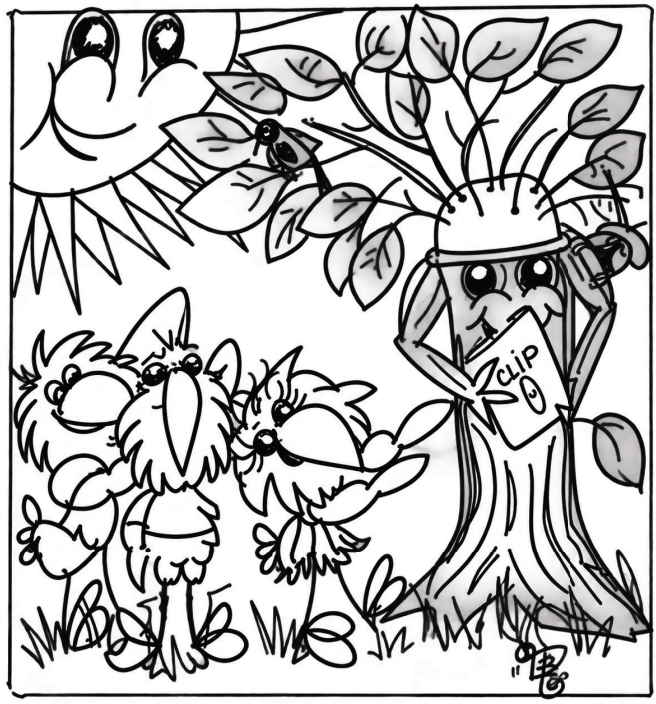
She softened. “I love you, Foghorn Krenshaw.”

He kissed her beak and told her, “You are the best thing that ever hatched in my life. I want to build our nest together; this is just a part of that start.”

Best Layed Plans

The planning committee met the following day. Lance showed up with a clipboard and wearing a hard hat.

“What’s with the hard hat, Lance? We’re not breaking ground till the diggers show up,” Foggy said.



“Just getting into character,” Lance replied.

“Character is an understatement,” EB groused.

“I’ve completed the necessary transfer to build on Elma’s grass. I need to get the YS, Yolklahoma Services, involved in permits. I’ve also contacted the GCC, General Chicken Contractor to manage all the dirty work.”

Surprised was not the word to describe eggzactly how surprised they were that Lance had a solid branch on the required plans.

Grace turned to Lance. “Your kindness and generosity are heart-warming. It’s more than I ever imagined. Thank you, Lance.”

She hugged his bark.

“Is that a bit o’ sap streamin’ down your trunk, Mr. Tough Tree?” Foggy teased.

“It is not; I may be sensitive but I don’t sap! Well, maybe a tince for Grace.” Lance blushed.

“Inspectors show up tomorrow. GCC too. We are going to build Yolklahoma’s Lance Family Intereggospheric Skating Stadium!” Lance announced.

“About that name… I flink it’s a bit too long. How about a vote? You know the Yolklahoma way?” EB asked.

“Well, you know how I would vote,” said Lance.

“Yes, we all know, Lance,” said EB.

“How about Full of Grace Skating?” Foggy said dreamily.

“Uh… no,” said Grace. “I feel that it needs to be a community center for all of Yolklahoma, and we can put a plaque right at the front entrance acknowledging Lance and his Grandma Elma.”

“What if we call it the Yolklahoma Roots Skating Rink and Community Center? Whatcha all flink?” asked Foggy.

“Roots, hmm…A plaque in front with my name and granny’s? Nice… can we do it in a precious metal like Brash?” Lance asked.

“You mean brass?” Grace asked.

“Same thing,” Lance chirped.

“All in flavor, say, ‘Yeah go for it!’”

Uneggimous. It was settled.

Great Eggzspectations

EB arrived home to tell Chickalee how the meeting went. She was standing in the roost room when he came in.

“Hi, Chickie. What a day, you’d never believe what we had to deal with. That tree is out of his trunk sometimes…”

He paused. He looked at Chickalee.

“Somethin’ wrong?” he asked.

She smiled, patted her tummy and said, “I’m with egg!”

Silence.

Frozen, EB blinked twice.

“Like… You’re…”

Chickalee nodded. “With egg.”

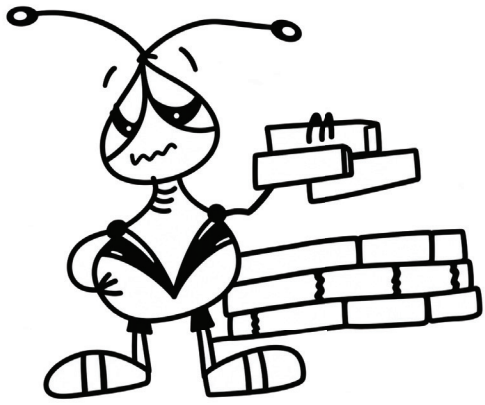
His beak opened.

Closed.

Opened again.

“We’re with…egg?”

CHAPTER 17



THE BUILD

Grace was walking up with someone Foggy didn't know.

"Fog, this is Zooz Brownbird, she's the head of the Ice Water and Small Reptile Department. She will be overseeing the rink build."

Zooz Brownbird extended a wing to shake Foggy's wing.

"Nice to be aboard this community project. Thanks for havin' me."

"How's the permit approval going?" Foggy asked Zooz.

"Well, we've got seven of the eight permits in the coop."

“What’s the last one?”

“The Official Permission to Apply for the Final Permit,” Zooz told them.

“What’s the hold up?”

“It’s that dang Yolklahoma Department of Building, Nesting and Questionable Permits division. They are a tough egg to crack, that YDBNQP.” Zooz shook her head.

“Is that the department that’s got that mission statement, ‘If it’s Worth Building, it’s Worth Over Permitting?’” asked Grace.

“That’s the one,” Zooz replied. “Well, no matter what, I’m looking forward to making this a real showplace.”

“Gracey’s vision is to have a place for the whole family, little chicks to grandparents. Skating, tweet-a-longs, playgrounds and art.” Foggy beamed with pride as he shared Grace’s goals with Zooz.

“Very admirable goals,” said Zooz. “A community center gives our residents a destination, a place they really want to go, socialize, and learn something new. It’s stimulating! Good for keepin’ that old noggin sharp. And you mentioned art classes. What kind of art classes are you going to offer, Grace?”

“Not sure yet, but we’ll be keeping the town informed as we move ahead,” Grace promised.

“I love crafting since I was a little chick. Ma taught me to weave meal worm silk. Dad, well, he was a water guy. Always on his boat. He loved that thing. Said it was for more than just sticking a pole in the water to catch some fish. ‘Makin’ memories,’ that’s what he always said,” Zooz explained to Foggy and Grace. “But he passed a year ago, and that dang boat is rusting away.”

A twinkle sparked in Grace's eye.

"Are you selling his boat?"

"Sell it? I'd pay someone to haul that old thing away. Dad would've hated seeing his baby just sitting there, all unhappy and unused."

"We might just know someone who'd be very interested in taking it off your wings." Foggy smiled. "You know what I'm flinkin', don't you, Gracey?"

EB and his dream of owning his own boat was eggzactly what they had in mind.

"It could be a Hatchling Gift!" Grace replied.

"That would really be a gift like no other we could give. He's been my wing-man for all these years. I'd like to repay his kindness by helping to fulfill his dream."

Dinner that night was at Chickalee and EB's coop. Since Chickalee was nesting, she wasn't leaving her egg unattended for long.

Lance even offered to come by and egg-sit, but it was a big "no thank you" from Chickalee.

"Lance, sweet tree, you just don't realize your… uhm, own girth? Poundage? Eggs are very delicate and require a hen's gentle, soft, fluffy butt. I wouldn't let EB plunk his chubby chicken butt on it. Now, Gracey, she can egg-sit anytime!"

The boys went to get carryout at Cluckin' Delite. It was quick, delicious, and Chickalee didn't have to de-nest.

Grace was setting the table when she heard Chickalee squawk!



Chickalee shifted on the nest, then suddenly froze.

She looked down…then up at Grace with wide eyes. “Gracey…”

“What?”

“There’s another egg! I’m having twins, Gracey!!!” Chickalee rejoiced.

They both squawked with joy, followed by multiple loud, happy clucks.

The door flew open and the boys came rushing in.

“We heard the screaming! Are you okay? Is the egg okay?” EB fearfully asked.

“All is just fine. In fact, love of my nest, you are gunna be a papa to two! We’re having twins!” Chickalee told him.

EB flapped down into the closest perch.

“Twins? Two?”

“Yes, that’s usually the case with twins,” Chickalee chuckled as she sat back down on two warm eggies.

EB was sweating up a soup of a storm, fanning himself at the realization of not one kid, but two!

“Sweet meat, we’ve been blessed!” he said to the hen of his hatchlings. Guys, it couldn’t get any better than this!” EB sighed.

Chickalee eggweed.

“Well, old buddy, allow me to try,” said Foggy in a teasing kinda way.

“Tell him, Foggy, I can’t wait any longer! I’m gunna crackle!” Gracey said.

Still getting used to the big twin news, EB and Chickalee were speechless.

Speechless never quite happened to EB.

Foggy shot a quick glance to Grace and began.

“You know how you’ve gone on and on and on and…”

“Foggy, cut to the news!” Grace chided him.

“Well, we are getting you your own boat as your Hatchling Gift from us!”

EB fainted.

Chickalee got up from her nest.

Without missing a beat, Gracey sat on both eggs as Chickalee flapped to her husband, trying to revive him.



“EB, EB!” She shook him until he came to. .

“Did you just tell me…” he started, looking at Foggy and then to Grace sitting on his eggs. Then, looking at his mate, he continued, “and did you, my wife, lay a second egg and we’re having twins?”

Everyone just sat there grinning from beak to beak.

“Yes, we did!”

For the remainder of this blissful evening, Foggy shared Zooz’s boat offer.

EB declared, “Pinch me, Chicky, this has got to be a dream!”

So, as any good wife would do, she pinched him. Good and pinchy hard.

“Not just any old dream, Ebbers… Our dream.”

EB rubbed his drumstick where she’d pinched him.

“That’s gunna leave one shell-of-a-bruise! Yep,” he laughed. “Definitely not dreaming.”

Around the table, laughter filled the little coop.

For a little while, the whole of Yolklahoma seemed to breathe one big, happy sigh.

Outside, Lance, soon-to-be official uncle to twins, swayed in the evening breeze. If trees could smile, he surely was.


ANOTHER SNACK?
WOULD YA GRAB
ME A NAPKIN
FOR THIS COOKIE?

CHAPTER 18



HATCHING

EB couldn't wait to go down to the place where Zooz's father's boat was docked.

His dream of having his own boat was so close he could actually taste the salty sea air!

He wanted Chickalee to go with, but she refused to leave the eggs. It could be any day now, and she would not ask her friend Grace to egg-sit for even a moment.

Not for any other reason than these were her first babies coming into this world, and she wanted to be with them every single moment.

“No, the boat can wait until the chicks are born!” she announced to EB.

He completely got it. Really, he did. Kinda selfish for even thinking of the boat at that time.

“I will not go without her! The boat will wait,” he declared in a very boat-captain-like voice. It made him giggle a bit. “Babies first, babies first. I’m gunna go to the build site and see what needs to be done.”

He could use a little Foggy therapy. Over the years, when life got a little crazy, the boys would lean on each other for support. Some yolks, a few pokes, and before you knew it, smooth waters return.”

“Water…” EB dreamt. He couldn’t wait to be on his own ship with his first mate and wife, Chickalee, alongside.

“Then the children. I’m one fortunate rooster,” he thought.

Already in a better mood, he gave Chickalee a quick peck on the cheek.

“I’ll be home as soon as you need me. Love you,” he told her.

“How long?” she asked.

He smiled big and wide. “Until shell freezes over!”

“And beyond!” Chickalee softly added.

Grace was there with Chickalee, making some herbal tea to sip while they chatted and passed the time. EB felt comfortable enough leaving those two on their own for a bit.

After EB left, Chickalee confided in Grace, “I am so glad he’s going to work! He’s making me scrambled. I may be having two babies, but with Mr. Benedict, that makes three!”

Grace laughed. “And the big one is the neediest chick I’ve ever seen!”

Both girls had a good long laugh.

Chickalee cuddled her eggs all nice and snuggly. Grace read the new issue of Better Coops and Gardens.

The coop grew peacefully quiet.

No one was talking. No one at all worried about anything at this moment.

Chickalee sighed contentedly.

Peck…

Peck…

Quiet cheep.

Chickalee looked down at her little eggs and saw movement. A little jiggle. A tiny shell crack.

Peck…

Cheep.

Peck.

“It’s happening, Gracey! Call the job site. We gotta get EB home now! Next, the Hatchery! Next, the EMT!!!” (*Egg Medical Transport)

Grace, being the level-headed chick she was, the non-eggzpectant hen of the two, flapped into motion.

Grace got EB on the phone. He was eggstatic!

“I’m commin’ home, Chickalee!!!”

As they were hanging up, she could hear him shout to Foggy, “It’s time, Uncle Foggy! We’re gunna be babies! I mean, you’re gunna be babies! Oh, you know what I mean, Roos!”

Off in the distance, the EMT sirens could be heard.

Almost there.

“Where’s EB?” Chickalee worried that he wouldn’t make it in time to ride in the EMT with her.

“Worst case, we will meet you at the Hatchery. Everything will be just fine,” Grace promised her with an eggnormous amount of hope that she was right.

“I hope you’re right! Oh, EB, where are you? You can’t miss our first hatch! Please hurry!!”

The EMT arrived. A team of two entered the house.

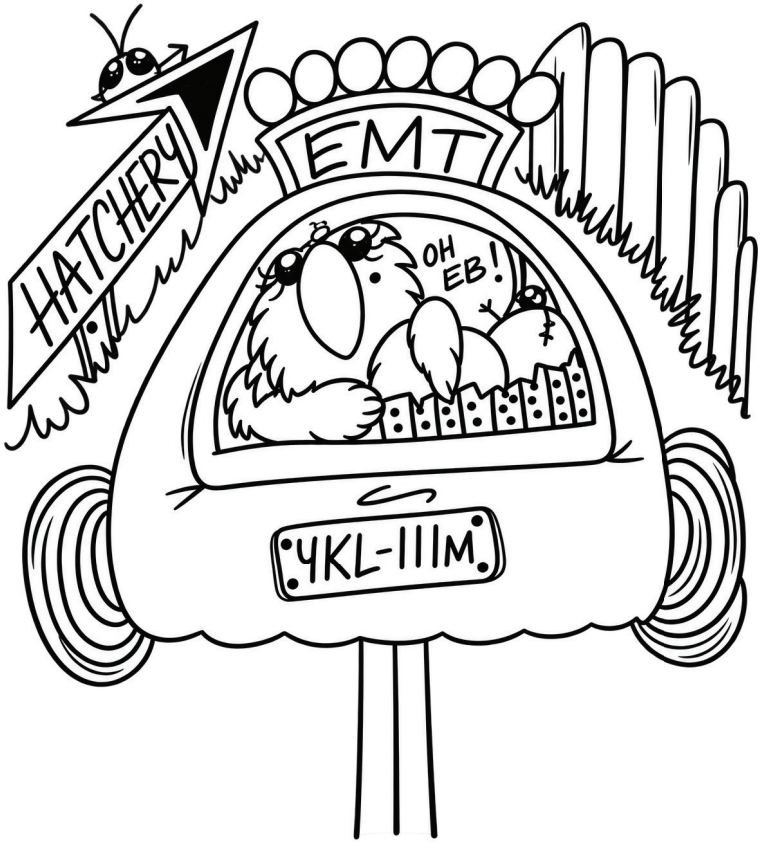
First, a quick eggssesment. The tech checked the eggs with a flashlight and saw movement.

“Lookin’ good!” said the tech. “Now grab the travel-nest egg carrier and the mom. Off we go.” Radioing in to the Hatchery, he announced, “On our way. Incoming: mom and two eggs.”

“But EB! Where is my rooster?” Chickalee cried as the EMT door was closing.

“We’ll meet you there, no worries, Mama!” Gracie called.

The siren faded into the distance.


HATCHERY
EMT
OH EB!
4KL-111M

CHAPTER 19



I AM

"Roos, you're gunna be a papa!" Foggy joyfully laughed.

"Can you believe it? Remember when we were just two little chicks getting bullied by those dunderhead geese?" Foggy reminisced.

"Excuse me, you two featherheads. I hate to interrupt your strut down Yolklahoma Lane, but aren't you supposed to be headed to the Hatchery with your wife and eggs?" Lance sharply asked.

"We've been clucking about the old days, and we need to go home and get Chickalee to the Hatchery!!! What kind of a papa am I gunna be?"

“A tardy one for sure, but the best papa ever! Now let’s go and make me an Uncky!”

The Hatchery Maternity Hospital was made up of big white coops all nested close to each other.

The EMTs drove directly to the Hatchery wing. They quickly got Chickalee and her two precious eggs into the delivery room.

“Where is that rooster?” Chickalee asked, looking left and right.

Head Nurse Flo Nightenday assured her that the minute he arrived, she’d bring him in.

Chickalee felt a little better with Nurse Flo’s reassurance.

The eggs were resting in the hatchery incubator, keeping those eggies nice and warm.

Chick pressed her fluffy face to the warm glass, both wings encircling her babies.

Will they be boys? Girls? Both? She didn’t care as long as they were healthy.

Nurse Flo came in pushing the soon-to-be papa to join his family.

“I found him, Mrs. Benedict! He’s all yours now!”

“I made it!” EB shouted.

Chickalee grabbed him, pinched him, and pecked him a quick kiss.

“Ouch! What’s with the pinching?”

“I’m so relieved that you are finally here to cluckin’ pinch!”

“Me too, sweet meat. I’d never ever miss this. Foggy and Grace are in the waiting roost. They are so eggcited to see our hatchlings.”

Doors burst open.

“Yolklahoma’s star eggstetrician and first-place winner of this year’s Eggie Ball Tournament, the one and only… Tah tah tah da… Dr. Boyd O’Doodledoo has arrived!”

EB whispered to his wife, “That’s the guy who is going to deliver our kids? Is there enough room in here for the rest of us and his eggnormous eggo?”

Nurse Flo calmly replied, “This happens all the time. You get used to it.”

He jumped into motion.

“Nurse, my tools… grabbers, chisel, and a spatula, stat!”

“Chisel?” EB questioned.

“Gotta get a little piece of a grub club sandwich that’s been stuck in my beak, driving me insane,” O’Doodledoo explained.

All eyes were on the doctor as he stroked the little eggs, feeling for signs of a crack.

“Yes, yes,” he whispered under his breath. “It is time to hatch these little ones.”

O’Doodledoo was a master. He gently removed each tiny morsel of fragile shell, one piece at a time.

“Ahhhhhhh. There it is! The teeniest little beak.”

Chickalee and EB held each other as well as their breath.

Meanwhile, out in the waiting roost, Grace and Foggy were anxious for the new arrivals. Foggy was pacing. Grace could see just how eggcited he was.

“Foggy, you are going to pace a trench right into that floor, and if Nurse Flo catches you, she’s gunna give you a bill!”



“Sorry, Gracey. I’m just so eggcited. It’s almost like it’s happening to all of us. I know that EB and Chick are the kids’ folks, but we’re family too… Uncle Foggy and Auntie Grace!”

Hearing Foggy’s mention of Uncle and Auntie melted her heart.

Grace pulled him close and asked him, “Do you think that might be us maybe someday?”

Foggy knew it will be eggzactly like that.

O'Doodledoo was seconds away from eggstracting the second chick from the shell.

"Okay, little one, are you ready to meet me? I mean your folks?"

While the first chick was about to emerge, a crackalation was coming from the second egg.

Fresh from the humidity of being inside the egg, a tiny, wet, yellow chick appeared.



“Here you are, little chicklet. So tiny, so pure,” he sighed as he handed each one to Nurse Flo for parent preparation. “Welcome to Yolklahoma, little ones. One male and one female,” declared O’Doodledoo.

Taking his stethoscope in wing, he carefully listened to their heart beeps.

“All good. My work here is done, so I bid you bye-bye and wish you a whole lotta luck with twins. You’re gunna need it.”

And he eggzitted out.

“Pay no attention to that eggotistical, but dang talented, truly nice guy. He knows his stuff,” said Nurse Flo.

Dr. O’Doodledoo had left the Hatchery.

Outside, a very tall tree was watching from the grass.

Cool breeze leaves rustled.

“Uncle Lance.”

Nurse Flo handed Mama and Papa the hatchlings for the first time. They were bundled in blankets and wrapped in so much love.

“They are the most beautiful babies I’ve ever seen, EB!” Chick-alee smiled through her tears. She has one wing around the little boy chick and the other around the little girl. EB joined them in an embrace.

EB sighed.

He looked at his son.

He looked at his daughter.

He looked at Chickalee.

He smiled.

For the first time in his life, EB didn't see a dreamer…

Or a sailor…

Or a young rooster searching for where he belonged.

He saw a husband.

A father.

A friend.

A flock.

He knew eggzactly who he was.

"This is the dream, Chick. We are now a flock."

CHAPTER 20



HOME COMING

Nurse Flo escorted Grace and Foggy into Chickalee's Recooperating Room.

There was squealing and squawking, punches and pokes, and that was just Foggy and EB ruff housing.

"You old capon!" Foggy teased.

"I'm a dad, Foggy; I'm a papa!" EB announced.

Grace was standing near Chickalee, lovingly watching the new babies sleep.

Chickalee said, “I flink it’s time to introduce Auntie Grace and Uncle Foggy to their niece and nephew!”

“Ohhhh, it’s a girl and a boy, how perfegg!” said Grace.

Chickalee poked EB under a wing in her favorite pinchy part. “EB, I think we should tell Auntie and Uncle the babies’ names!”

Foggy and Grace perched up straight to listen.

EB proudly announced, “The first hatched our son, Bryan Foghorn…”

Foggy gasped.

Everyone waited.

Then…

“Lance Benedict.”

“Roos… you gave him my name for a middle name? I don’t know what to say. I’m so, so honored,” Foggy said.

EB explained, “It’s the least I could do to thank you and let you know how much your friendship means to me. You’re my BRFF.” Then EB leaned closer. “I love you, Roos.”

Foggy was sniffling. He blew his beak, then wiped his tears on Gracie’s wing.

“And now we present our daughter, Shelly-Grace Benedict!!!” said EB.

Chickalee looked at Grace and told her, “You arrived in Yolklahoma not knowing a soul. I was fortunate that we had these two goofs to bring us together. I love you, Gracie Chickadee Krenshaw. You are family. You are flock.”

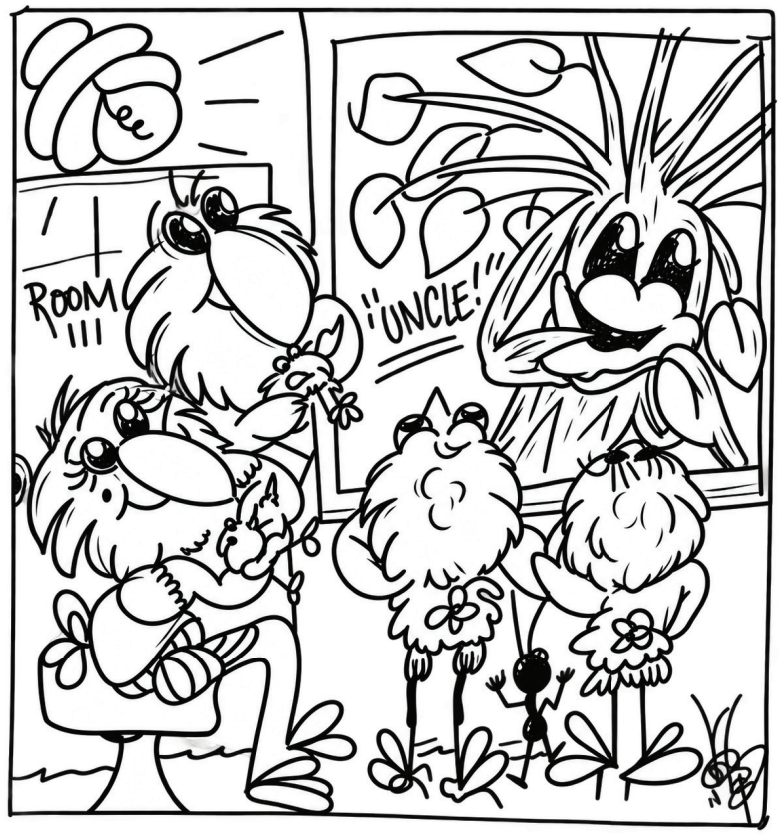
Grace whispered, “I finally have a flock.”

Tears and wet feathers all around.

The tiny new Yolklahomans were sleeping soundly through all the silly adult commotion.

In just a few hours, they would all go home to start their new life as the Benedict Flock.

A familiar voice spoke from the Recooperating Room’s window.



“Now let me take a good look at those precious little puffs!” said Lance. “They are darling, Chick. What’s their names?”

Chickalee began by introducing Shelly-Grace.

“Oh, how wonderful, Gracie. She’s got your name. Oh my, that’s adorable!”

EB piped in, “Now meet your namesake, Bryan Foghorn Lance Benedict!”

“Oh my, my roots are coming undone! You didn’t! I’m so glad you did! Bryan Lance, it sounds perfect, sophisticated.”

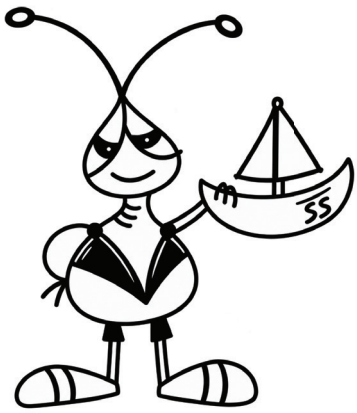
EB interrupted him. “The boy’s full name is Bryan, Foghorn, Lance Benedict. We named him after you both. Only seemed right since we three grew up together.”

“Uh-oh, he’s getting all sappy again!” said Foggy.

“I don’t sap! Okay, well, in this special event, who could blame this old tree? I’m an uncle! I’m an uncle!!!” Lance sang it over and over again.

A heartwarming laugh was had by all.

CHAPTER 21



SCRAMBLE

After a few very long days of eggzclamating to parenthood—an all-night peeping marathon, refusal to eat baby mealworm mush, and constant butt cleanup—the Benedict Flock was slowly finding their rhythm. A very noisy, very messy, occasionally backwards rhythm, but a rhythm, nonetheless.

“Work in progress,” EB would say too often.

“Maybee he’s trying to convince himself?” Chick wondered. “Maybee me too?”

Foggy showed up at the door asking, “Anybody ready to go see their boat?”

“Huh? Go see my boat?” EB said.

Chickalee happily shook her head. “Yes. Mama Benedict feels that it’s a good time for the entire flock to go and meet your new boat!”

EB had waited for this moment for as long as he could remember, but it was even way better than he remembered. He had Chick, plus Bryan and Shelly-Grace, to share the open waters and look toward the horizon as a family.

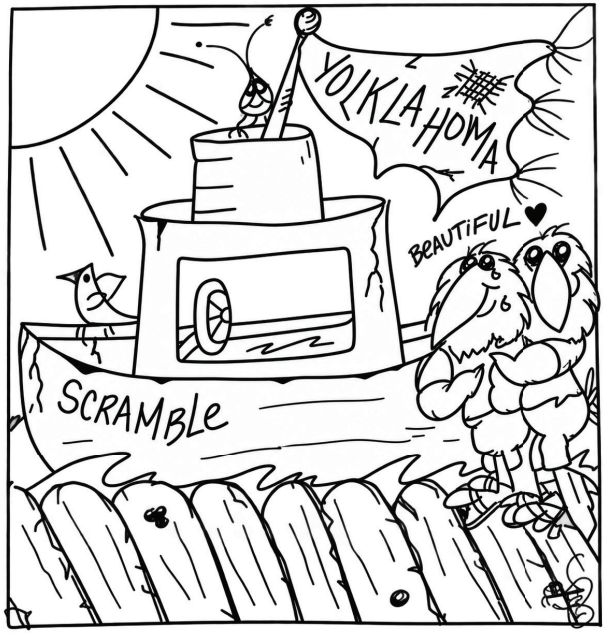
They all packed into Foggy’s Coop de Ville and set off to meet the boat.

Zooz Brownbird was waiting at the dock.

The car pulled in.

EB stepped outside to get a good look at his boat.

“Foggy, it is everything I dreamed it would be. She’s beautiful!” EB said.



Chickalee looked to Grace and shrugged her wings.

“Are you seeing the same boat as I am, Gracie? It needs a lot of work. There’s some rust on that plank.”

“Beauty is in the eyes of the rooster?” she questioned.

Foggy put a wing around EB and slapped him on the back.

“Whatcha flink of this beauty?”

EB was speechless.

So was Chickalee, but for different reasons.

Zooz said, “Come on board. I’ll show you around. Not a lot to see, but she was my dad’s heart for all those years. This is where he spent most of his time, on the boat puttering around the lake, rain or shine.”

“He musta really loved this old girl. Made lots of memories, I bet,” EB said.

Zooz got a little glimmer of a tear in her eye just thinking about how happy her dad was.

The girls stayed on the dock with her two cuddle bugs as the three went in for the tour.

Gracie winged Chickalee and pointed to the boat’s name.

“Scramble?”

“Might be an appropriate name for this geriatric boat,” replied Chick.

Laughter was heard coming from the boat. They were teasing EB, calling him Captain EB. He liked it more than he let on.

Returning to the dock, EB asked Chickalee what she thought. “Can we do this?”

She heard the longing love in his voice.

“Ebb’s, I just gotta say this. It’s gunna need a lot of repair and time. Are you sure this is what you want?”

EB stopped and looked out at the boat, then to the horizon.

“I have everything right here, right now. I’ve got you, Chick, the kids, the friends, and the one thing my heart has ached for all along is this boat. When I was little, I thought all I wanted was a boat. I was wrong. I realized what I really wanted is a life worth sharing.” He paused. “This boat completes my dream! I now have everything I ever wanted and hoped for, and all of you are a big part of making it come true.”

Not a dry feather on the dock.

“But hang on… one thing I demand changing!” EB told Zooz.

“Sure. It’s your boat now. What’s the change?” she asked.

“From this moment on, this vessel shall be known as the… Special Seas Scramble. The Home of Many Magnificent Memory Makings! Or, for short, SS Scramble!”

Many an eyeball rolled as the sun began to wander off into the distant horizon.

If this boat was going to live up to its full “Memory Makin” name, it had just made its first one.

CHAPTER 22



PLAN D

"What a beautiful morning!" Foggy exclaimed. He was feeling good because the new Community Center would be completed soon. Then he would be able to put plan "Propose to Gracie" into action. He was almost giddy thinking about it, a huge goofy smile plastered across his beak.

"Nothing could upset this day!" he thought.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Zooz Brownbird having an argument with some building inspector. You could always tell by the clipboard, disheveled work suit, and hard hat.

“This smells ungood,” Foggy said.

As they approach, the argument got way more intense.

“Nope, no sir—” stated the inspector.

“Ma’am,” Zooz corrected.

“I mean, ma’am. Very sorry about that. This building is not up to code. It is in violation of the X22701-Q policy. All work must cease until repaired!”

“What the shell is the X22701-Q policy anyways?” Zooz shouted once more.

Foggy’s attention moved back and forth from Zooz to the inspector as they battled it out.

“For the 111th time, you don’t have the appropriate hinges on your doors! These are not regulation parts. They are hinges pretending to be hinges! Big trouble. I cannot approve this work until they are replaced with the correct part, and that is the… Are you writing this down, ma’am? I don’t want to see another cluck-up on my watch. Part number H311LJL in brass. Got it?”

Zooz wearily shook her head as the inspector left the site.

“Okay, Zooz, explain this in clear Yolkaleze for me. Are we in danger of missing our plan to open in 11 days?” Foggy asked.

“No,” Zooz sharply replied. “We will possibly miss our goal by ten times that! Yes, Foggy. 111 days. We are in trouble.”

She went on to explain that it wasn’t just replacing the hinges. It’s was getting all the parts and installing them, and that was a shell of a lot of work!

Foggy felt sick.

“What’s the option? What can we do? This can’t crack my plans. I don’t want to wait longer.”

Zooz shook her head again. “I got some serious flinkin to do, Fog.”

“I got some squawking to do with one BRFF,” he said as he stomped off to find EB.

Foggy was convinced this was the worst thing that could happen—a true Thundercluck never to be fixed.

EB was inside looking at some updated plans. He saw a very angry Foggy approaching.

“Whoa, Roos! What’s eggin you?” EB asked.

Foggy proceeded to tell him the problem. He was out of breath.

“Ebb, this is…”

“Thundercluck.”

“Thundercluck if I’ve ever seen one!” Foggy flapped down to catch his breath.

He continued telling EB what Zooz told him about the timeline, all the extra work, and scrambling for resources to do the work.

“It’s totally beak,” Foggy moaned.

EB attempted to get Foggy focused. “Roos, I gotta flink. There’s got to be a way to open on time! Go find Zooz and we’ll put our heads together and come up with a solution.”

The team of three huddled.

“Let’s squawk the doables. We can get the parts delivered tomorrow. That’s the good news,” Zooz said. “Then shift the labor to remove the current hinges.”

“And what’s the not-so-good news?” asked Foggy.

Her body language peeped for itself. Feeling defeated, Zooz told the boys, “Labor. Rooster power. We didn’t plan for this. We don’t have enough.”

Foggy crumbled into a pile of molted feathers. “We’re cooked.”

EB was flinkin out loud, “OK, we can get the parts. We can start removal now, but we need more help that won’t interfere too much with the schedule. Hmm, correct me if I’m wrong, Zooz, but replacing those hinges isn’t a brainiac task, right? Almost any feather head could do it?”

“Guess so, but who you flinkin?”

EB smiled that big old EB grin. “I know some unemployed dunderheads who may want to catch up on community pride.”

“The GEESE???” Foggy shouted.

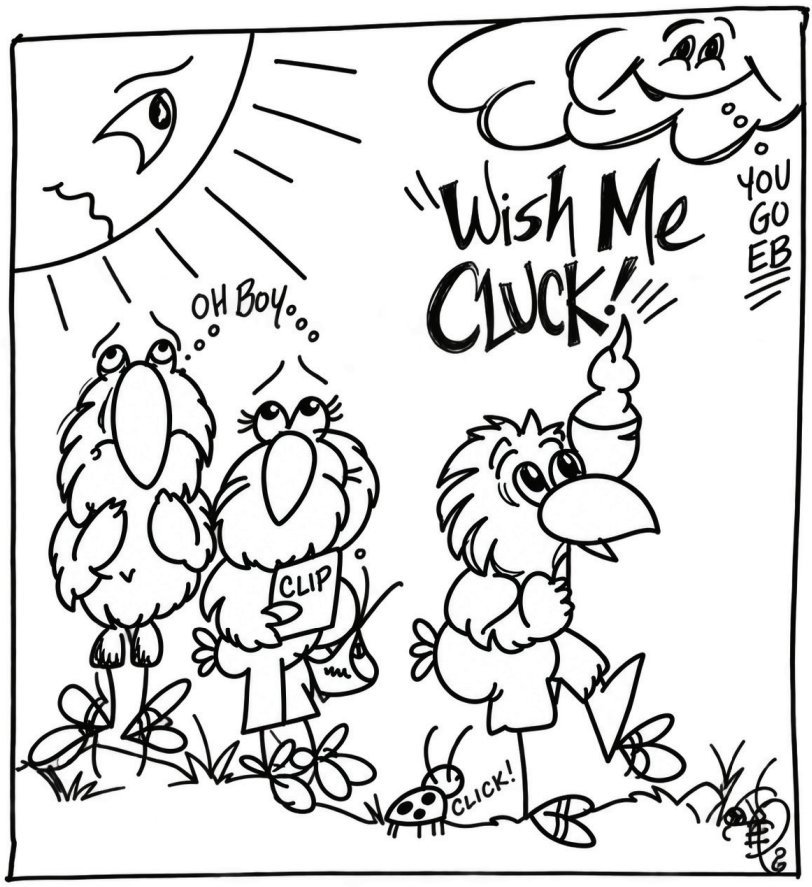
“Our old nemeses, the geese. We have a few favors to collect. I’m going to make that call.”

Stunned, Foggy groaned, “What’s next?”

“You let me take care of this, and you two get the guys moving while I execute Plan D!” EB announced.

“Plan D?” Zooz questioned.

“Plan D. I gotta go see some Dunderhead feathers of another color. Wish me cluck!”


OH BOY...
CLIP
"Wish Me CLUCK!
YOU GO EB
CLICK!

CHAPTER 23



UNITED

EB knew this wasn't going to be a coop-walk, but he knew the geese had been out of work for months after the closure of Duck, Duck, and Goose Down Feather Factory. Hard times.

And he and Gary Gozling were now on OK terms since Gary apologized for the years of bullying him and Foggy.

Gary confessed, "EB, I spent years trying to make my honk louder by making yours quieter. I was wrong."

EB accepted Gary's apology and explained how this could be a win-win for the community. Gary's fellow geese might even call him a minor hero for getting them back to work.

The two birds shook wings in eggweement.

"Deal!"

Back home in his cozy coop with Chickalee, EB giggled.

"You are never going to believe who's coming to help tomorrow morning!"



EB arrived before the crack of egg to accompany Foggy and Zooz to watch the parade of incoming help.

Over two dozen geese showed up at the site, Gary in the lead.

You could hear the chickens' doubt, the lack of trust from being bullied by these geese for generations. It wasn't looking good.

Gary stopped in front of EB. They shook wings, smiled at each other, and faced the crowd.



Gary spoke for the geese.

“It’s been a long time coming, and we have a lot of rebuilding and mending, in more ways than one, and that’s what we are here to do!”

The crowd of geese shook their heads to eggknowledge their leader's sentiment.

EB stepped up and shared a welcome speech.

"This Community Center is not just for one bird; it is for all. Together, working wing to wing, we will accomplish greatness that will last a lifetime, for our children and our children's children."

Applause rang out from the entire crowd.

Chickens and geese finally unified in a common cause. Long overdue.

"Now let's do it!" Foggy and EB yelled.

You have never seen a flock of feathers come together as they did that day. It was history makins!

Chickens and geese standing side by side, with one goal: grand opening in 10 days.

Foggy hugged his buddy so tight it was almost a pinchy thing. "I owe you, Roos."

Teasing him, EB said, "You just better marry that girl of yours and make me an uncle!"

From off in the crowd, a voice was heard.

"Teamwork makes… uh, the birds work!" chanted Lance.

The hum of busy birds was eggzillerating.

Gracie came by the site to bring Foggy some lunch and a well-deserved hug for solving the center's timeline.

Hugging him this time was so perfect, so right. She felt the Yolklahoma spirit capturing her soul.

“I’ve got something to ask you,” Foggy said.

Grace looked at him.

“I can’t wait anymore, Gracie. The past few days have led me here.”

Grace was silent.

“When I started building this Community Center, I realized that my purpose wasn’t about proving Yolklahoma to you. It’s about creating a place where you feel loved, respected, and home. I want to make a lifelong commitment to you…”

Foggy perched on a pile of two-by-fours.

“Will you please marry me and have a flock of our own?”

Silence.

Foggy held his breath.

“Well?” he asked, not wanting to wait any longer.

Gracie placed one wing on Foggy’s beak.

“Yes!”

CHAPTER 24



FLOCKED

The Genius

“Bryan Foghorn Lance! You stop digging at my roots; it’s itchy!” Lance warned.

“K, Uncky!” Bryan chirped.

The chatter stopped.

It became so quiet you could hear a feather drop.

Every eye turned toward Bryan.

Chickalee shouted, “Bryan baby, you just spoke your first word! Oh, I am so proud of you, sweet Bry!”

EB gently attempted to correct his son. “Bry, that’s Un-cle. Uncle Lance, can you say that?”

Bryan, with his big green chicklet eyes, smiled and said, “Uncky.”

“Can you say Uncle?”

Waiting…

“Uncky!”

“Genius boy. Takes after his Uncky Lance.”

“Sure, son, your first words aren’t Papa or Mama. Noooooo, gotta be the tree,” EB pouted.

“Well, why not? I’m his uncle, chicken sitter, and playground all in one big, beautiful trunk!” defended Lance.

Some unintelligible sound blurped out of EB.

Shelly-Grace broke the tension with the sweetest little tweet, aimed at her silly little brother Bry, Papa, and Uncky Lance.

“Boys!” she said as she crossed her wings.

The laughter started with Lance, then Chickalee. It became a Benedict Flock laugh.

All was perfegg.

Ta-Da!

Foggy was wrapping his wingtips around Grace’s eyes. It was finally time for her to see the skating rink. Not only see it but give it the Gracie christening it deserved.

The temperature was cold, but she was warmed by Foggy's love as he guided her to this moment.

He took his wings off her eyes and shouted a big, "TA-DA!"

Grace couldn't speak.

She began to tear up. She was so touched by his love for her.

"Hey, Gracie, no time for tears. You gotta get on that ice and give me quality control feedback! If it isn't the gooses knees, well, it won't be good for anyone!"

He handed her the skates she had from back home, all nice and broken in for this maiden voyage on Yolklahoma ice.

She eggcitedly put them on.

She stood at the foot of the rink.

Took a deep breath.

She was focused.

And… she was off!

Skating like the pro Foggy had come to know and adore.

She did that circley, spinney, dizzy thing she does and comes to a complete halt right in front of him.

Huge smile.

"Well?" he asked.

"It's more than perfegg," she said. "It's Yolklahoma perfegg."

The Pinch

The day had finally arrived.

In his wildest dreams, Foggy never imagined that he would be marrying Grace, the love of his life.

He looked around.

Community Center.

Friends.

Gracie.

He pinched himself.



OUCH!

“Nope… Still real.”

The Reveal

An hour before the ceremony, Foggy had something eggstremely important to do.

It was time to show EB!

Foggy clapped his wings, running off to find him.

“EB, I have something to show you. Come with me.”

Foggy pulled EB into the skating area.

“Why we here, Fog? Everything okay, Roos?”

“Everything is good. It’s very good. I want to show you something I did especially for you.”

“For me?” EB questioned.

They walked into the arena, and Foggy pointed one wing.

“Up there.”

EB saw something his brain was trying to wrap around.

“What in the holy shell??”

“It’s the Eggosphere,” Foggy proudly replied. “I had it built for you. You and the community, of course, but I wanted to honor our friendship, our brotherhood, our love for each other. Ya know, Roos, I don’t know where I’d be today without you in my life. You’ve helped make all of today come true.”

EB couldn't believe the beauty of the skylight, but even more, he could not believe the beauty of his best friend's soul.

EB got all teary.

Foggy began, "This is us, Roos. Who we were. Who we've become. And what our chicks are gunna grow up under! I'm hopin' ya like it."

The two roosters stood in silence, wings wrapped around each other, looking up at this symbol of their shared lives.

Foggy looked at the time.

"Yikes, Roos, we gotta go get me married!"

CHAPTER 25



FOUND

The Ceremony

The wedding party stood ready.

Foggy at the altar, EB at his side. Lance spread his branches in a big stretch in preparation to receive the bride.

A flute player began. It was reminiscent of a gentle breeze on a Yolklahoma autumn day.

Chickalee walked down the aisle. She was stunning. EB threw her a soft peck.

Next came Shelly-Grace, the flower chick. She carefully pulled out one petal at a time and watched them float to the ground where Grace would soon walk.

“Your turn now, little ring bearer,” whispered Grace as she gently nudged Bryan forward.

“I’m the ring BEAR, Auntie Grace!” Bryan Foghorn Lance announced and laughed, and all the guests did, too.

And then… Grace.

All eyes were on this magnificent bride.

Foggy took one look at her and, if possible, he fell in love with her all over again!

She met him at the altar.

Silence.

Lance began. “Dear family and friends, we are gathered here together as one.”

Gracie was mesmerized by the emotions, and Foggy was bursting with pride.

And for just a moment, the two were frozen in time, back on the ice where they first fell together and their love began to hatch.

Lance’s voice brought them back to this moment.

“Do you, Grace, take Foghorn as your rooster, and do you, Foghorn, take Grace as your hen to love and cherish…”

Pause.

Lance took a deep breath.

“Until shell freezes over?!!!!!”

“We do!”

They embraced.

They pecked.

Cheers erupted for the bridal couple.

The Reception

So much fun! There was dancing on ice! Foggy gave it his all by hanging on to Gracie for their first dance. He kept mouthing, “Don’t Let Go!”

Shelly-Grace and Bryan climbed on their favorite tree uncle, laughing and swinging on branches.

Lance announced, “It’s time for the toast from the Best Roos, EB!!!”

Big applause, especially from the Benedict family.

EB stood before the guests and took a moment before saying a word.

“I remember this skinny chicken back before Kiddiegarden. We were being blasted and bullied by a gaggle of geese.”

“Oh, shell, EB, I thought we were over that!” yelled Gary Gozling, the one-time leader of the geese, now best acquaintance.

“All good now, Gar!” EB laughed, and he went on with his speech.

“Lots happened since then. The service, me in the Waterseals, you in the Maroons. You met Gracie, fell in love, built this Community Center so she’d always feel at home. Roos, you stood next to me at my wedding, and you were there when we had the kids.”

He smiled at the happy couple.

“Gracie, Roos, we are now one big, happy flock.”

Applause.

It was time to cut the cake! Each had a big piece and shovelette. They both scooped up a hunk, crossed wings, and attempted to feed each other.

No such luck! The bride was feeling frisky, so she missed his beak, and it got all over his cheek!

“My dearest, my turn!” Foggy declared.

The shovelette was homing in on her head, her beautiful veil, oh no…

What’s this?

Foggy softly landed the piece of wedding cake at the tip of her beak.

Guests were clanking their utensils on the glasses to make it clear that the bride and groom should peck!

Grace and Foggy said, “Why not!!” and they pecked!

It was like a movie out of Pollywood!

What a night. The best ever, many said, as they were saying good night.

Everyone left.

Looking Up

EB carefully wandered alone onto the rink. Looked up. The huge skylight filled the ceiling.

Little footsteps. A tiny tug on his wing. “Papa?”

He looked down.

Shelly-Grace.

She stared upward. “That’s beautiful, Papa.”

EB smiled. “That’s called the Eggosphere.”

She whispered it, “Egg sphere.”

Long pause.

Then…

“I like it, Papa.”

EB gathered her into his wings.

They simply looked up together.

No speeches.

No explanation.

Just a father sharing wonder with his daughter.

Some dreams do come true.

The very best ones are the ones that are shared.



A WORD FROM VALOR



SEEYALATAH

Dear Humans—or, as we here call you, “two-leggers”—

It has been an honor to meet you and share this eggventure with you.

This is not goodbye. It’s a “seeyalatah.”

We’ve become BRFFs!

And THAT’S till shell freezes over!

Be kind.

Be loving.

Be respectful.

And now, we return you to your regularly scheduled life.

Valor cluckin’ out.

YOLKALEZE GUIDE

Language & Phraseology

Language

B

Beak Peck — A quick little kiss.

Best Roos *(see Roos)* — Best buddies; also Yolklahoma's version of best men—the Roos chosen to stand with a groom at his wedding.

Better Coops and Gardens — A Yolklahoma home-decorating publication featuring the latest in coop décor, gardens, and stylish flock living.

Branch Heads — Tree folk. Usually said when they're being a little thick in the trunk.

C

Capon (noun) — A rooster who's had his swagger taken down a notch. In Yolklahoma, a playful insult exchanged between friends.

Chickees — An affectionate name for chicks or chicken friends.

Chicken Pup — A Yolklahoma pup of the chicken persuasion.

Chickhood — The time in life when a chicken is growing up.

Chicklet / Chicklets — A little chick; little chicks.

Chickling / Chicklings — A young chick; young chicks.

Chicklist — A chicken's list of things to do, remember, or accomplish.

Chicofication *(see Chicofied)* — The process of becoming Chicofied.

Chicofied *(pronounced "chick-o-fied")* — Animated with the ability to communicate with Yolklahoma residents.

Chicken Scratchins – The author-drawn illustrations scattered throughout *Finding Your Flock*; Yolklahoma's own visual scribbles, doodles and story marks.

Circley Twisty Thing — A highly technical Yolklahoma term for something that circles and twists.

Circley, Spinney, Dizzy Thing — An equally technical term for something that spins around enough to make you dizzy.

Cluck-up / Clucked Up — A mistake, mix-up, or mess-up; something that has gone wrong.

Cluckin' Delite — A fast-food establishment serving Yolklahoma cuisine.

Cluckin' Pinch — A pinch with a little extra cluck behind it.

Coop-walk — A Yolklahoma walkway or path around the coop.

Crackalation — The act or moment of cracking open.

Cratch (verb) — To scratch, scrape, or claw at something, usually with great enthusiasm and very little finesse.

Cratchin' (verb) — The act of cratching. Often accompanied by flying feathers and questionable results.

E

Embarrassment Pink — The particular shade of pink a Yolklahoman turns when caught in an embarrassing moment.

Eggcellent — Excellent.

Eggcited — Excited.

Eggcitement — Excitement.

Eggzclamating — Exclaiming or speaking with great excitement.

Eggies — A sweet, affectionate way of saying eggs.

Eggility *(pronounced "egg-gil-it-ee")* — Agility, Yolklahoma-style.

Eggknowledge — Acknowledge.

Eggknowledgment — Acknowledgment.

Egglamentary *(pronounced "egg-la-ment-ah-ree")* — Elementary.

Egglectricity *(pronounced "egg-la-tris-ah-tee")* — Electricity.

Eggmanship — Sportsmanship or good conduct while competing.

Eggmotionally *(pronounced "egg-mo-shun-lee")* — Emotionally.

Eggnormous *(pronounced "egg-norm-us")* — Enormous.

Eggo *(pronounced "egg-oh")* — Ego.

Eggosphere *(pronounced "egg-oh-sphere")* — The universe or great beyond surrounding Yolklahoma; connected with The Up There.

Eggotistical *(pronounced "egg-oh-tis-tik-al")* — Egotistical.

Eggsack — Yolklahoma's version of a backpack.

Eggshell-silver — A Yolklahoma shade of silver.

Eggspecting *(pronounced "egg-speck-ting")* — Expecting.

Eggspert *(pronounced "eggz-pert")* — Expert.

Eggssesment *(pronounced "egg-sess-ment")* — Assessment.

Eggstatic *(pronounced "egg-stat-ik")* — Ecstatic.

Eggstetrician *(pronounced "egg-stay-trish-on")* — Obstetrician.

Eggsterminator *(pronounced "egg-sterm-in-a-tor")* — A Yolklahoma professional called when the grubs stop being ingredients and start eating the furniture.

Eggstra *(pronounced "egg-strah")* — Extra.

Eggstracting *(pronounced "eggz-track-ting")* — Extracting.

Eggstraterrestrial *(pronounced "eggz-tra-ter-rest-ee-ul")* — Extraterrestrial.

Eggstremely *(pronounced "eggz-tream-lee")* — Extremely.

Eggventure *(pronounced "egg-ven-tur")* — Adventure.

Eggventurer *(see Eggventure)* — Adventurer.

Eggvice *(pronounced "egg-vice")* — Advice.

Eggwee *(pronounced "egg-wee")* — Agree.

Eggweement *(pronounced "egg-wee-ment")* — Agreement.

Eggzact *(pronounced "eggz-act")* — Exact.

Eggzactly *(see Eggzact)* — Exactly.

Eggzacute *(pronounced "eggz-ah-cute")* — Execute; to carry out or put a plan into action.

Eggzaustion *(pronounced "eggz-aust-shun")* — Exhaustion.

Eggzillerating *(pronounced "egg-zill-er-rating")* — Exhilarating.

Eggzits *(pronounced "eggz-it")* — Exits.

Eggzplain *(pronounced "eggz-plane")* — Explain.

Eggzplorers *(pronounced "eggz-plor-ers")* — Explorers.

Eggzspectations *(pronounced "eggz-peck-tay-shuns")* — Expectations.

F

Feathercure — A Yolklahoma manicure for your claws. Getting your claws feathercured.

Flink / Flinkin — Think / thinking.

Fon-Don't *(pronounced "fahn-don't")* — Fondue, Yolklahoma-style.

Fowl Doin's *(pronounced "fah-well-doo-ins")* — A trendy Yolklahoma fine-dining restaurant run by award-winning chef Cookie J. Childs.

Fryday — Friday.

Fwimmin — Swimming.

G

Grub Burger — A Yolklahoma burger featuring grubs.

Grub Club Sandwich — Yolklahoma's version of a club sandwich, featuring grubs.

Grub Parm / Grub-Parmesan *(Parmesan pronounced "parm-ah-zon")* — A Yolklahoma Parmesan dish featuring grubs.

Grub-chip — A frozen dessert made with grubs and chips.

H

Head Fluff — A headache.

Hollandaise *(pronounced "hahl-en-daze")* — Holiday in Yolklahoma.

I

Ice Feet — Like sea legs; the ability to move comfortably on ice.

Ice-sick — Like homesick, but longing to be back on the ice.

Intereggospheric *(pronounced "in-ter-egg-oh-sphere-ik")* — Between or across Eggospheres.

K

Kiddiegarden — Kindergarten.

L

Light-beaked — Light-headed or dizzy.

Liquid Love — Love expressed in liquid form; often tears.

Little Brunchman — An affectionate nickname for EB.

Lover-Roos *(see Roos)* — Roos in love.

M

Mealworm Multi-Grain Chip Muffins — A Yolklahoma baked treat made with mealworms, grains, and chips.

Mealworm Silk — A fine Yolklahoma material made from mealworms.

O

Open-beak — Open-minded; willing to listen to or consider something new.

P

Peeping Marathon — An all-nighter or extended stretch of baby crying or peeping.

Perfegg *(pronounced "purrf-egg")* — Perfect.

Pinchy Thing — A little pinch that's like a love bite; affectionate rather than mean.

Politically Chicken — Yolklahoma's version of politically correct.

Pollywood *(pronounced "pahl-ee-wood")* — Yolklahoma's version of Hollywood, where the birds are the stars.

R

Recooperating Room — A room for recovering and resting after medical care.

Ring BEAR — Ring bearer. No actual bear involved.

Roos *(pronounced "rooz")* — Dude; a friendly way of addressing another guy.

Roost Room — A Yolklahoma bedroom or sleeping room.

S

Scrambled — Confused; mixed up in the head.

Seeyalatah – See you later. Not goodbye. Just see you later.

The Shady Gang — A group of wise, grandfatherly Chicofied trees.

Starclucks — Yolklahoma's coffee shop.

Sweet Beak — An affectionate term for someone sweet or dear.

Sweet Chicken Heart — A kind, loving, tenderhearted chicken.

Sweet Meat — An affectionate term for someone dearly loved.

T

Thundercluck — A sudden burst of chaos, commotion, or trouble. A Yolklahoma-scale disruption.

Travel-nest Egg Carrier — A portable carrier for safely transporting eggs.

Tweet-a-longs — Songs meant to be sung—or tweeted—along with.

U

Uncky *(pronounced "un-kee")* — An affectionate Yolklahoma name for an uncle.

Uneggimous *(pronounced "you-negg-ah-muss")* — Unanimous; everyone Eggwees.

Uneggzpected *(pronounced "un-eggz-peck-ted")* — Unexpected.

Ungood — Not good.

Unnanamoose Eggweement *(pronounced "you-nan-ah-muss"; see Eggweement)* — Unanimous agreement; everybody agrees.

Unneggessary *(pronounced "un-negg-ah-sary")* — Unnecessary.

W

Wicken Chicken *(pronounced "wick-en chick-en")* — A chicken who practices witchy ways.

Wing Bump — Yolklahoma's version of a fist bump, done wing to wing.

Wing Kiss — A kiss sent from one's wing to a loved recipient.

Wingy Thingy — A Yolklahoma Celebration Flock Dance.

Wingy-ing — Using or moving your wings.

Y

Yet-to-Knows — Things you don't know yet; answers or discoveries still waiting to be found.

Yolk Protein — A top-notch source of enrichment added to fitness beverages.

Yolk-yellow — The particular rich yellow color of egg yolk.

Yolkaleze *(pronounced "yoke-ah-leez")* — The language of Yolklahoma.

Yolking — Joking, Yolklahoma-style.

Yolklahoma *(pronounced "yoke-lah-home-ah")* — A dimension and state of soul where Finding Your Flock takes place.

Yolklahoma Perfegg *(see Yolklahoma; see Perfegg)* — Perfect by Yolklahoma standards; exactly right for Yolklahoma.

Yolklahoma Sigh *(see Yolklahoma)* — A particular Yolklahoma expression of relief, resignation, or emotion.

Yolklahoma Wiggle *(see Yolklahoma)* — A move derived from, or performed as part of, the Wingy Thingy Celebration Flock Dance.

Yolklahoman / Yolklahomans *(see Yolklahoma)* — A resident or residents of Yolklahoma.

Yolkster — A Yolklahoma jokester or playful troublemaker.

PHRASEOLOGY

All in Flavor — Everyone who agrees or supports the idea. Yolklahoma's way of saying the flock is on board.

Before the Crack of Egg — Very early in the morning. Before most of the flock is even stirring.

Best Layed Plans — Plans that seemed like a good idea before they hatched. Sometimes things just don't go as planned.

Break of an Egg — The beginning of a new day; bright and early.

Brothah from Another Hen — A friend so close, he feels like family.

Chicken Wire Balance — A Maroons Eggility test requiring balance while making your way across chicken wire.

Climb the Coop — A Maroons Eggility test that puts climbing skills to the test.

Comb to Claw — From the very top of your comb to the tips of your claws; your whole self.

Double-dirt Smack My Grandma's Chicken-butt — An expression of complete surprise or disbelief. For those moments when an ordinary "wow" just won't do.

Drop an Egg — To suddenly give someone a problem, surprise, or troublesome bit of news to deal with.

Dropping His Eaves — Listening in on a conversation that wasn't exactly meant for your beak.

Dunderhead Feathers of Another Color — Something—or someone—that turns out to be quite different from what you thought.

Every Bit of Cluck — Using every little bit of good fortune you can get.

Get Out of His Own Egg — To stop getting trapped inside your own thoughts and let yourself move forward.

Hard-as-Shell — Really tough, difficult, or unyielding.

Hatchling So to Cluck — A Yolkish way of saying "so to speak."

His Story Makins — Something important or memorable happening right before your eyes.

Holy Shell / What in the Holy Shell — An expression of surprise, shock, or disbelief when something is seriously unexpected.

It's Totally Beak — Yolklahoma slang for cool, good, or all right.

I'm With Egg — Expecting a little one. A Yolklahoma way of announcing that the flock is growing.

Knee-high to a Grub — Very small or very young. Usually when remembering somebody from way back when.

No Cracking Up — No laughing when you're supposed to be keeping a straight beak.

Not a Dry Feather — Everyone was feeling it. There may have been a few tears in the flock.

Not an Ice Cube's Chance in Shell — Almost no chance at all. Things are not looking promising.

Oh Shell — An expression used when something goes wrong, catches you by surprise, or makes you think, "Uh-oh."

Oh Tweet — An expression of alarm or warning when something may be going wrong. Uh-oh… trouble could be coming.

Outta the Carton — Thinking or behaving differently from what's expected. Definitely not staying inside the usual box.

Over the Moons — Extremely happy or excited. And yes, moons—Yolklahoma has two.

Peck on the Back — A little recognition or praise for something well done.

Rooster Power — Rooster, Chick, Hen, or Chickling power. The special strength, talent, or ability that makes you you.

Rooting for You — Tree Speak for cheering someone on and hoping they succeed.

Scrambling for Resources — Hustling to find what you need when supplies, help, or options are running short.

Shell No — A very definite no. No hesitation. No Eggweement.

Shell of a Lot of Work — A whole lot of work. More than a few feathers may get ruffled getting it done.

Shell-of-a-Soup — One seriously impressive soup.

Shell-of-a-Bruise — A really big or painful bruise. The kind you're definitely going to remember.

Shut-beak — Stop talking—or keep something to yourself.

Smart-butt Rooster — Someone who's being a little too clever for their own feathers.

Squawk the Do-ables — Talk through what can be done instead of getting stuck on what can't.

Sweatin' Soup / Sweating Up a Soup of a Storm — Sweating a whole lot, usually from working hard, worrying, or getting overheated.

Teamwork Makes… Uh, the Birds Work! — Working together helps the whole flock get things done.

That Tree Is Out of His Trunk — Tree Speak, translated into Yolkaleze; someone who's acting a little wild, ridiculous, or unlike themselves.

Thick as Chicks — Very close friends who stick together.

Till / Until Shell Freezes Over — For a very, very long time. Basically forever.

Total Beak — Yolklahoma slang for bad, awful, disappointing or just plain ungood.

Total Yoke — Cool, good, great or something you're really into.

Tough Egg to Crack — Someone or something that isn't easy to figure out.

What the Cluck — An expression of surprise, confusion, or disbelief. Usually all three.

What the Shell — An expression of surprise, confusion, or frustration when something just doesn't make sense.

Wing to Wing — Side by side; together.

Wish Me Cluck — A request for a little good fortune before trying something important, difficult, or new.

Without a Shadow of a Shell — Being completely certain. No doubt about it.

Wrong End of the Fish Stick — the Yolklahoma version of "the wrong end of the stick." To be on the receiving end of something unfair, unpleasant, or unfortunate.

You Get My Bark — Tree Speak for "you understand what I mean."

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Why chickens, you ask?

Why not chickens?

It's a fair enough question. And like most things in Yolklahoma, there's a story behind it.

Finding Your Flock began at my kitchen table during a difficult time with my senior dog, Zuzu. I found myself doodling as a way to deal with life.

Somewhere between pencil and paper, a few ridiculous chickens with big beaks and goofy faces began to emerge. Before long, they had names, personalities, a community of their own—and apparently plans to take over the Eggosphere.

Oh, and by the way, those little black-and-white illustrations scattered throughout the book? Around Yolklahoma, we call them Chicken Scratchins.

At first, they didn't even have eyes.

My sister, Lisa, kept asking me, "Why don't you put eyes on them?"

Eventually, I did.

And I liked them.

Those chickens quickly became something Lisa and I could laugh about, play with and build upon. She was my sounding board, idea thrower, producer, and occasionally, pain-in-the-neck editor.

Together, we watched this ridiculous little world grow into Yolklahoma.

Finding Your Flock would become the last creative project the two of us shared.

Underneath all the chickens, puns, ridiculousness, and Yolkaleze, *Finding Your Flock* is a story about belonging, friendship, accepting differences and discovering what connects us.

I believe there is a flock for everyone.

Your flock might be one person. It might be two. It might be 111. And it might not look anything like you expected.

Sometimes we have to look beyond what makes someone different long enough to discover what we share and what's really important. Maybe they have feathers. Maybe they have antennae. Maybe they don't know how to tie their shoelaces.

Does it really matter?

Sometimes something just clicks.

Soul to soul.

Lisa and I had that.

I think if Lisa could hold this finished book in her hands, she would laugh. She would cry.

And then she'd probably ask, "Why the cluck isn't my name on the cover?"

That's my sister.

This book carries the gratitude, love, and humor that were at the heart of our relationship. Creating it with Lisa was a gift.

Now I get to share that gift with you.

Go find your flock.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Lou, my biggest fan and the guy who has supported me through all of this ridiculousness. Thank you for believing in me and Yolkla-homa. And for officially declaring Finding Your Flock Head Quarters as Egg Quarters (EQ).

You thought it.

I hatched it.

We're keeping it!

To my kids, Jon, Dani, and Adrianne who have had a front-row seat to my particular brand of ridiculousness.

To my collective family who are very happy that I've finally found another outlet, somewhere else to share all the eggs that live inside my head.

You're welcome.

To my sister, Lisa, for continuing to whisper in my ear whenever she wants to add her two eggcents.

I hear ya, Leecee!

To Kelli Blouin, whose online drawing and Let's Tangle, Minutes of Zen classes became part of my daily life during Zuzu's hospice journey. Your creativity, encouragement, and steady presence gave me

a place to breathe, play, and keep creating during a tender time. Thank you for being there, even from afar.

To Chet, my right hand… literally. You helped me sort through the scrambled, find the funny, protect the heart, and turn a world living in my head into something I could hold in my hands. You helped me find my flock.

And a very, very, very special acknowledgment to my Girls, the Labrador Trilogy:

Roxy, my Muse.

Zuzu, my Heart mender.

Frankie, Five Angels, Ruthie Rose, Tiny Dancer, Litaly Kaplan, My Savior.

You taught me what unconditional love really means and how much humor, respect, and ridiculousness can live right alongside it.

About the Author

Pam Baren Kaplan is an author, empath, and quirky storyteller who loves animals and the occasional human.

After 32 years in the corporate world, Pam was "released to the universe"—someday to be known as the Eggosphere—and found her next act as a coach, teacher, and eventually a pet loss grief counselor. Her work with people and animals has always been rooted in the same belief: kindness matters, connection matters, and sometimes a little humor can get us through the hardest days.

Pam has always created stories and characters. As a child, storytelling began as a way to get her little sister to stop talking and go to sleep. Later came stories told at sleepovers, then stories for her own children, and superhero tales in which her kids were always the stars. She is the author of *Tails of Unconditional Love: Your Journey Through Pet Loss Grief* and has contributed to collaborative and multi-author books.

During a difficult season in 2023, while caring for her beloved dog, Zuzu, Pam found comfort in drawing. Somewhere along the way, a goofy chicken appeared—and eventually, so did Yolklahoma.

Pam grew up knowing what it felt like to be different—to be an outsider. She was bullied. She was very tall, taller than the average kid her age, moved often after her parents' divorce, and never

really felt like she belonged. Years later, she watched her children navigate their own challenges with friendship and belonging.

Perhaps *Finding Your Flock* was a story waiting for her all along.

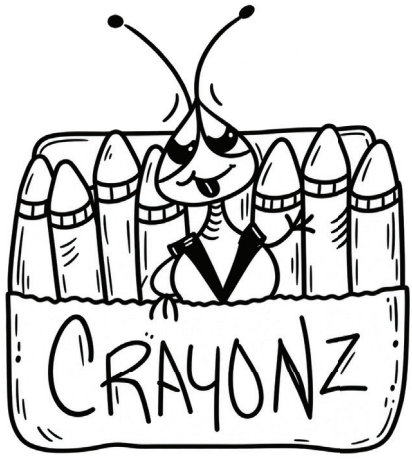
Its message is simple: Find your flock. Find your peeps. Be loving. Be kind. Be a friend to others. And always make room at the table.

Today, Pam lives her fairy-tale dreamish life with Lou, her husband and biggest fan, and Frankie, her beloved Chocolate Lab—better known as Inspector Frank Cuddles, head of Cul-de-sac Patrol and on duty 24/7.

After all these years, Lou and Pam are still trying to figure out who's really running the house.

The Inspector, of course

A LITTLE COLOR FROM THE EGGOSPHERE!



Ever wonder why the Chicken Scratchins are black and white?

Because they're waiting for YOU to bring them to life!

Grab your crayons or colored pencils and give Yolklahoma a little color of your own. Purple chickens? Polka-dotted eggs? A green Valor?

Why the shell not?

Just one little word of advice: Skip the markers. They have a sneaky habit of bleeding through the pages.

And who likes bleed anyway?

Want more Chicken Scratchins to color?

Join the flock and get FREE printable coloring pages featuring your favorite feathered friends!

Because in Yolklahoma, imagination isn't just welcome.

It's required by Yolklahoma regulation LJL-1130-XYZ12!

And you do not want to mess with the Department of Eggforcement!

COME JOIN THE FLOCK!

You've been found. You belong.

The story may be over, but the adventures in Yolklahoma are just beginning!

Around here, you're never too young, too old, too different, or too wonderfully weird to belong.

There's only one requirement for joining our flock:

Come on into the coop! But bring your imagination!

Visit us in Yolklahoma, where you'll find more feathered fun, free printable coloring pages, and a flock that always has room for one more.

Join the flock!

Official Yolklahoma Notice

Rule# 1111-D-1130 -LMNop

No chickens were harmed, eaten, or otherwise entrée-fied in the making of this book.

Yolklahomans are friends, not dinner food. And we do not eat our friends.