

SPECKLES

KEYWORD: Love for Home.

Our story today is about a hen called Speckles. She belonged to a little girl whose name was Shirley.

Speckles lived away out in the country on a big farm with a number of other hens and a Father Rooster. There were horses there, too, and also many cows.

It was a very interesting place to live. There were so many things to be seen and so much work going on. There were fields of grain, of grass, and of clover; also an orchard where there were peaches, apricots, grapes, and many other kinds of fruit. The horses pulled the plows and harrows

over the soil so that the carrots and beets and other vegetables, and the grain and fruit could grow well. The cows were busy eating grass and clover, and turning it into rich milk so that the boys and girls could have it to drink.

Even the big Father Rooster was as busy as could be. He was always on the lookout for a nice fat worm. When he found a dainty tidbit of that sort, he did not gobble it up greedily. Oh, no! he was much too gentlemanly for that. He held it carefully in his mouth and called out in chicken language, "Come, dears, I've got something nice for you." When the hens heard him, my, what a race there was! Each hen with her wings spread out ran as fast as she could. Speckles was such a smart little hen that she very often won the race and got the worm.

Should a hawk come flying along very low, looking for a chance to pounce upon a chicken, how indignant Father Rooster would be! Warning his hens to hide quickly under the pepper tree, he would ruffle up his neck feathers and prepare to do battle. He would look so fierce and ready to fight that the hawk always pretended it was looking for something in the next field and so did not stop.

Speckles often wished that the rooster would not be so fussy about calling the hens to get up in the morning. That was one of his duties though, and being a very conscientious old chap he never neglected anything he knew he should do. Quite early in the morning he would stand up on the roost and cry out in a loud voice: "Cock-a-doodle-doo-oo-oo." It was his way of saying, "Time to get up, my dears."

"Oh, dear!" Speckles would say to herself, "it surely can't be time to get up already. I'm so sleepy." She remembered that Father Rooster had made a mistake once on a lovely moonlit night. He had thought it was morning because it was so light, and had called to them to get up in

the middle of the night. Of course she did not hurt his feelings by ever mentioning it, but when Speckles heard him crow, she would open an eye a little and take a peep. If it was dark, she would tuck her head under her little wing and take another nap. When he started to crow again, she knew she had better get up and dress quickly so as not to be late for breakfast.

"Dress!" you exclaim? Why, yes, didn't you know about that? Of course hens do not dress themselves in the same way that boys and girls do, for their feather clothes remain on both day and night. But this is the way that Speckles dressed herself: when she got up, or rather hopped down from her perch, the first thing she did was to shake herself. Not a little shake but a great big one; so big and hard that it made all her feathers stand out loose and fluffy. Then away she ran for a drink of water, lifting up her head when she drank as though she were giving thanks. The next thing she did was to preen her feathers with her beak until they lay all sleek and smooth. She had a novel way of dressing her head. She simply lifted up a foot and scratched her head, using her toenails for a comb. Don't you think she was clever?

By the time the hens were dressed, Shirley's brother Billy was pretty sure to appear with their breakfast. You may be sure they were always glad to see him come.

Billy was quite a tease. He used to tell Shirley that the right name for Speckles was "Freckles," because she had little brown spots all over her; but Shirley thought Speckles was the prettier name.

One day Shirley came running into the house, calling excitedly to her mother, "Mother! Mother! come and listen to Speckles, quick. She is learning to sing like Dickie." (Dickie was the canary.)

Her mother laughed and said, "All right, honey, just

wait till I see if little brother is asleep." Then with Shirley dancing along beside her she went out to see Speckles. Sure enough there was Speckles, with her little comb as red as a cherry, running about the chicken yard making a happy little noise of "Caw-ca-ca-ca-ca," just as though it were a song. It really was a song of gladness because she felt so happy.

Mother smiled while she helped Shirley make a nice little nest of straw in a box for Speckles. A few days later Speckles sang another song. It was a song of gladness, too, though human folks who do not know any better call it cackling. Speckles had laid an egg in her nest, and she was telling the glad news to all her friends so that they could all rejoice with her. They cackled, too, and so did the big rooster, so there was quite a hubbub over it. When Billy came home from school, Shirley told him about it, and he said he guessed the hens had started a "glee club." I think he was pretty wise, don't you?
