

John Yeoman
and
Quentin Blake



Featherbrains



STORY
BOOK

JOHN YEOMAN

Featherbrains

Illustrated by

QUENTIN BLAKE



PUFFIN BOOKS

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PUFFIN BOOKS

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John Yeoman and Quentin Blake's first collaboration was on the school magazine at Sidcup Grammar School. They both went on to read English at Cambridge University, after which they continued to work together in what has proved to be an enduring creative partnership in children's books.

John Yeoman spent twenty-eight years teaching, for most of that time as Head of the English Department at the Lycée Français in London. He now devotes his time to writing – stories and verse, and also song lyrics for children's radio and television – as well as indulging his passion for gardening, the theatre, classical music and opera, and reading.

Quentin Blake began his career drawing cartoons for magazines such as the *Spectator* and *Punch*, but he is now best known for his distinctive children's book illustration, and as the creator of many best-selling titles. Head of the Illustration Department at the Royal College of Art from 1978 to 1986, he is now visiting Professor. In 1987 he was awarded the O.B.E.

By the same author

In Puffin

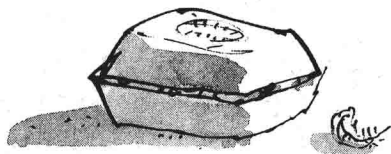
A FAMILY ALBUM

In Picture Puffin

MOUSE TROUBLE



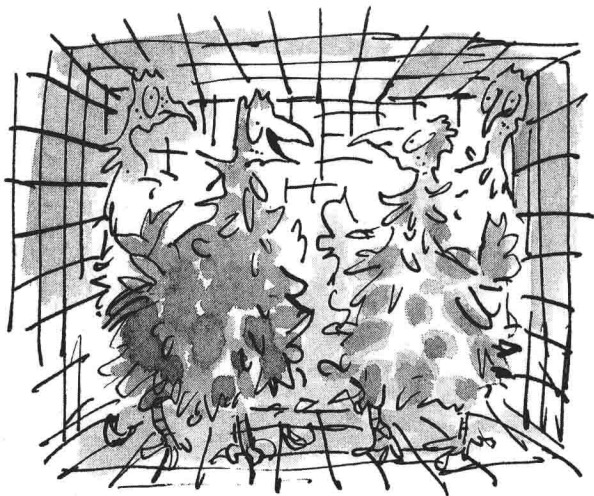
One



Flossie and Bessie lived on Fairacres Farm. At least, that was the name printed on the egg boxes. It was actually just a very long shed with a passageway running right down the middle and chicken cages piled high on either side.

Flossie and Bessie, who were sisters, shared a cage with Maggie and Aggie, two other hens. It was the one nearest the doors, on the bottom row on the right-hand side.

The shed was full of chickens; about twenty thousand of them. But they didn't talk much. When nobody's been anywhere or done anything there isn't very much to talk about.



That Thursday began like any other day. When the lamps (there were no windows in the shed) were turned up automatically at seven o'clock, the hens took their heads from under their wings and blinked a bit in the light.

"Did you sleep well?" asked Flossie.

"Yes, thank you," said Bessie. "I had a lovely dream."

"That's nice," said Flossie. "What did you dream?"

"I dreamt that I was in a cage in a long shed. And then I woke up."

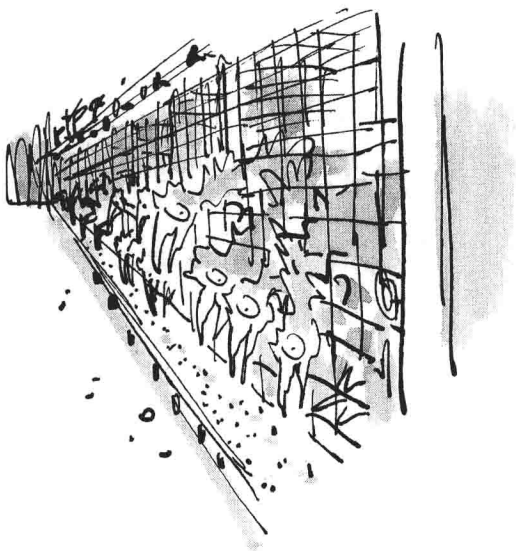
Flossie looked wide-eyed. She never had

dreams. Bessie was the imaginative one. "You are lucky," she said.

"Ooh, look," said Bessie. "Breakfast."

She always said that at about this time, because this was when the machinery switched itself on. First it began to hum, then it went clunk-clunk a few times, and then something even more exciting happened: the belt at the bottom of the metal channel that ran past all the cages started to move along.

After a while chicken-feed began to travel past and, by pressing themselves against the bars of the cages and standing on each others' necks in turns, the four hens were able to peck at it.



“It’s the same as yesterday,” said Bessie, between beakfuls.

“That’s nice,” said Flossie. “It was very tasty yesterday. I really enjoyed it yesterday.”

They said this every day. Aggie and Maggie didn’t say anything, though. They were too busy eating. They were usually too busy to talk: too busy eating, or sleeping, or staring into space.



Two

So far, then, this Thursday was just like any other day. That is, until a small, dark, glossy head poked through the gap where the doors didn't quite join, and looked around inquisitively. It was a jackdaw, and he decided to come in.

Nosiness is the jackdaw's next-to-worst fault. His worst fault is that he tends to steal things. When people take things which don't belong to them we call them light-fingered. Well, jackdaws are light-beaked. Very friendly, but very light-beaked.



He took a quick look round, hopped the whole length of the passageway, saw that there wasn't anything worth collecting, hopped all the way back again, said "Pooh!" in a choking voice, and turned to leave.

"Just look at that poor chicken," said Flossie.

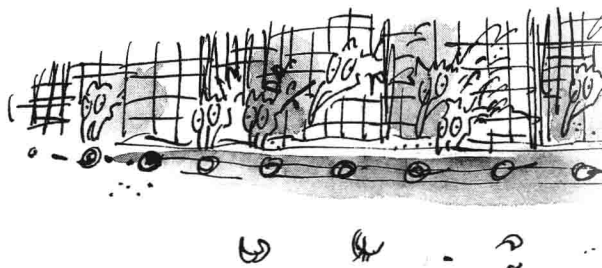
"Jackdaw," said the jackdaw.

"Good morning, Jack," said Flossie. "You look terribly skinny. Doesn't he look skinny, Bessie?"

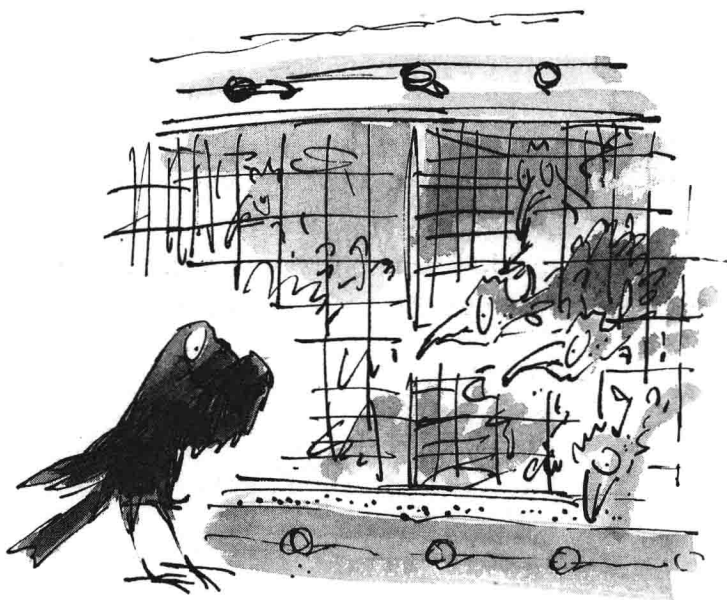
"Yes, he does," said Bessie. "You really should look after yourself, Jack. Didn't you have any breakfast? I bet he didn't have any breakfast, Flossie."

"I bet you never have any breakfast, from the look of you, Jack," said Flossie. "Come on, have a bite to eat with us. It'll do you good."

"It'll fatten you up," said Bessie.



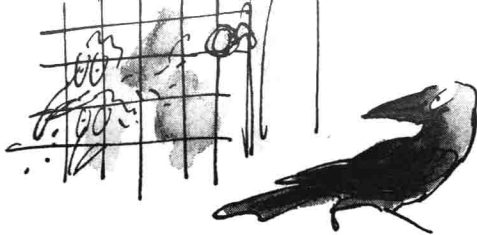




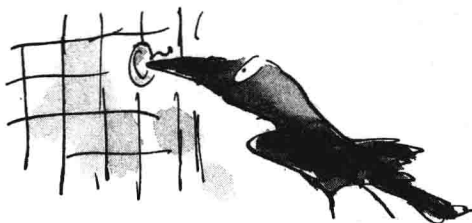
The jackdaw was rather touched by their concern and craned his neck over the metal channel. What he saw and smelt passing by on the belt made him clap his wing over his beak.

“Thank you all the same,” he gulped, “but I was just on my way to find some breakfast when I popped in. If you’ll excuse me, I must be off now.”

“*Find* some breakfast?” said Flossie to herself, puzzled.



But as he turned to go, the jackdaw noticed a shiny metal button glinting on the side of the cage. Now, jackdaws can't resist shiny things and, as he couldn't believe that it was any use to the hens, he thought he might as well have it.



With a sharp stab of his head he tried to peck it off but – to his surprise – the button didn't come free. He tried again, and again, and then the metal object suddenly sprang up with a clang, making the cage door swing open.



In panic Aggie and Maggie pressed themselves tightly against the back wall of the cage. Flossie and Bessie stood blinking in bewilderment.

Then the jackdaw had an idea. "Since I seem to have unlocked your cage, ladies, wouldn't you care to join me for breakfast outside?"

"Outside what?" asked Bessie, more bewildered than ever.

"Do you mean there's another shed behind those doors?" asked Flossie.

The jackdaw couldn't think how to explain. "Why don't you take a look for yourself?" he said. "You can always come back in if you can't find anything tasty."



Three



Once they were out in broad daylight the two sisters stood stock still, huddling against each other for reassurance.

“It’s very cold out here,” said Bessie.

“Perhaps we ought to go back in now. We don’t want to catch a chill.”

“It isn’t really cold,” said the jackdaw, trying to encourage them. “It’s just that it was so overheated in that shed. Anyway, it’ll feel much warmer as the sun gets up.”

This didn’t make any sense to Bessie as it was always the same high temperature in the shed.