

It's Perfectly True

(From Hans Christian Anderson)

Adapted by Amy Friedman

It was one of those perfect summer evenings, the kind when all the animals are singing and the air is filled with sweet summery scents. The hens flew up to their perches in the henhouse and clucked along with all the other animals.

One little white hen sat preening herself, happy that her feathers were so very white and soft. Suddenly one of her feathers came loose. In the light breeze the feather drifted out of the henhouse down into the fields below.

"Oh," sighed the hen, "There goes a feather. Oh well, they say that a little thinning of the feathers improves one's appearance. I suppose I should keep on preening. That way I'll become even more beautiful than I already am."

But the little hen had no intention of losing more feathers. She was quite unhappy about losing just one feather, so she stopped preening herself. Instead she looked up at the bright white moon and sighed again. "I suppose I would be beautiful even without my feathers. The moon has no feathers at all, and the moon is beautiful."

Now the little white hen's neighbor saw the feather floating through the air and heard the little white hen muttering. She turned to the hen beside her. "Did you see that feather? Did you hear Henny? She's lost a feather, and she says she doesn't mind. Silly hen! She thinks she'll be more beautiful without any feathers at all!"

"Cluck, cluck," said her neighbor, and she turned to the hen beside her. "Did you hear that? Henny plans to pluck out all her feathers. She thinks that will make her the most beautiful hen in the whole henhouse. Imagine that!"

Just then the owls in the big apple tree beside the henhouse gathered together to begin their evening song. They happened to overhear the hens' chatter.

"Tu-whit, tu-whoo," said Mother Owl. "Have you ever heard anything like that? That hen is disgraceful. She plans to pluck herself clean!"

"Tu-whoo," answered her children, and they hooted to the pigeons perched on the barn roof "Henny plans to pluck out all her feathers! It's perfectly true!"

The pigeons could not contain their surprise. They flew to tell the bats. "The little white hen has plucked out all her feathers. "It's truu, truuu ..." they cooed.

The bats opened their wide eyes even wider.

"Plucked clean?" they exclaimed. "Why, she'll freeze to death without her feathers!"

And off they flew to tell the chipmunks and the rabbits and the horses in the fields this terrible news.

"Neiiggghhh," cried the horses, and they galloped through the fields, alerting sheep and goats and cows of the disaster. aThe hen has plucked herself bare, and she's shivering and shaking in the cold night air. She's sure to die."

The chipmunks scurried fast across the fields high with hay to tell the moles and beavers.

The beavers stopped their work and stared at each other. aImagine a bare hen on such a cold night," they said, for by now it was very late, and the wind had picked up, and the night air was chilly indeed.

The beavers' voices carried on the swift cool wind, and news spread to the farmyard on the far side of the river.

The hen has plucked herself clean and she's freezing to death," the pigs in the fields grunted.

The pigeons heard and flew to the roof of the henhouse. aIn the farm across the river," they cooed, "a hen has plucked herself clean. She's died from the cold! The others are terribly sad. It's perfectly, absolutely truuu!"

Now all the hens gathered together to discuss the news. "Shameful," clucked Mother Hen. "Imagine that. Such vanity. And now she's died from the cold."

All the animals ran to hear thc news and to gather the latest happenings. Throughout the night they listened and passed along the news as it came. Just before dawn the owls, with heavy eyes, broke the news to the far away henhouse. "The other hens are dying of broken hearts," the owls explained. "Tu-whit, too true, hoo hoo."

"Terrible!" crowed the Rooster. "Terrible indeed!" and he flew to the top of the barn roof to announce the tragedy.

"Cock-a-doodle-do!" he crowed. "Wake up! Wake up one and all and listen! I have a story to tell. It's not a nice story at all, but it's perfectly true!"

"Too true!" nodded the pigeons.

"Tu-whit, too true," added the owls.

The animals gathered beside the henhouse to listen to the crowing rooster.

"Here it is," he said. He bowed his head. "The hen across the way plucked out all her feathers thinking she might make herself more beautiful. Naturally she froze to death. The others are dying of broken hearts. It's a terrible story, but it's no good trying to keep thus a secret. Tell anyone you please. The news must be heard to keep all other hens from plucking out their beautiful feathers."

"We'll spread the news," the bats squeaked, and the Rooster crowed, and the hens clucked, and the horses neighed, and the pigs grunted, and the sheep baaed, and the chipmunks chattered, and before long the story flew from one henhouse to another and to another after that.

By afternoon the news had spread all the way to the city and it was printed in the newspaper.

"One hen," the story said, "plucked out all of her feathers. Four more hens wished to prove that they were just as beautiful, all for the love of a Rooster. And so the other four hens plucked out all their feathers, too. All five hens froze to death. And this is a serious loss to the owner, a very poor farmer."

When the little white hen who had lost one white feather read the story, she clucked and looked at all her friends. "Read .this," she said. "It's quite a shame. I despise hens who are so vain. And the others are just as bad. Serves them right, you know, for being so foolish."

The other hens gathered around, and they too read the story. "What a shame!" they clucked. "Oh what a shame. It's a good thing stories like this make the news."

"Perfectly true," agreed the little white hen.

Printed in the "Tell Me a Story" column in *Las Vegas Review- Journal*, July 31, 1995.

Reproduced without permission.