

BROWNIE

KEYWORD: Patience.

Brownie was the most venturesome of all Speckles' children. He really caused her a great deal of anxiety, though he did not mean to, of course. Even when he was a tiny fluffy ball of a chick, he would get lost just outside his coop. He would at once set up a shrill cry of, "Pee-ep, pee-ep," meaning, "I'm lost, I'm lost." Of course, being just outside the chicken coop Speckles would hear him at once and call, "Cluck, cluck, here I am, Brownie, here I am." In this way he learned to have faith in his mother, but he did not learn to take better care of himself.

No matter how many times he got lost in a day, the very next day he was sure to have the same thing happen to him again. It was a good thing for him that Speckles had so much patience, wasn't it?

Sometimes Brownie would run up to another hen thinking she was his mother. He soon found out his mistake though, for he got a good hard peck. This was just the hen's way of boxing his ears and sending him home to his mother.

The chicken yard where Brownie lived was fenced with wire netting. In places there were holes under the fence large enough for a chicken to creep through. Speckles warned her children never to venture outside the fence, as there were many dangerous things out there. Brownie did not really mean to be naughty and disobey his mother, but one day when he was chasing a beetle, he slipped under the fence after it without even thinking of what he was doing. Then when he noticed where he was, he looked around him in great surprise. He thought it looked like a lovely place,

and as he did not see anything that looked dangerous, he concluded that Speckles had made a mistake. He found such a lot of grasshoppers to chase that he had a very good time. But he found it hard to catch them. He ran and ran until he was all tired out. Just as he would reach one, up it would go in the air with a whirr of its wings, and he would have to run after some more.

Finally he decided to go home and rest under Speckles' wings awhile. But where was home? Where was Speckles? In alarm he lifted up his head, and cried "Pee-ep! Pee-ep!" He listened but not a sound could be heard, no welcome "cluck-cluck" from his mother. He stood up on his tiptoes, stretched his neck, and called again and again. He cried till his voice was hoarse and croaky but in vain. Then he ran and ran, first one way, then another way. His little legs ached so with running, but still he could not find his home. "Oh, if ever I find my way home, I'll never be so careless again," he said to himself. He stood still and again he peeped, "I'm lost. Oh, Mother, where are you?"

Just then Brownie heard a little rustling in the grass, and soon he saw a big snake gliding along. He had never seen one before, but felt sure it was not a worm. It must be dangerous, he thought, so away he ran as fast as he could squawking with fright. Again he stood up on his toes and sent out his forlorn wail for help.

The shadow of a hawk flying low overhead swept along the grass. It was well for Brownie that Speckles had taken such pains to teach her children to hide from flying things. Into a tangle of weeds he buried himself, cowering low and trembling with terror. After a while he crept out of his hiding place, and cried out again for his mother.

The Sun was sinking low. Soon it would be dark. Oh, how could he stay out there in that big field alone? The very thought of it made him shudder with cold and fright.

He wandered on and on, tumbling over the sticks and stones because he was so tired and weary, every little while sending out a frantic cry of, "Mother, I'm lost, I'm lost. Oh, Mother, where are you?"

Just as he was about to give up in despair, he thought he heard away off in the distance the voice of his mother. He listened. Yes, he was sure of it. The "cluck-cluck" of his mother was the sweetest music to his ears. He forgot all about being tired, and how he did run! Every moment or so he would stop and call out, "Where are you?" Speckles would answer, "Here I am." Then he would run again in the direction of her voice. At last he reached the fence, but so tired and worn-out was he that he could not find the hole. Speckles kept clucking away to him though, telling him not to lose heart, and at last he found the right place and crept into the yard. Such a poor little bedraggled and tired-out Brownie! There under his mother's wing he crept to snuggle up close with his brothers and sisters. What a lovely place was home. Never again would he be so careless as to get lost. He never forgot about the snake and the big hawk, and he had learned a lesson that he would always remember.
