

A SPECIAL DAY AT GRANDPA'S FARM

"Come on, Jenny, I'll race you to the barn!" Eight-year-old Matt and his older sister pelted toward Grandpa, waiting in the open doorway. Matt's head start helped him reach the barn two strides ahead of Jenny.

"Glad you're here! You can meet our new foal, and help me close up. That storm is getting closer. We have to get back to the house before it breaks." Grandpa hurried inside, glancing back at the dark clouds and the trees bending in a high wind.

In the dim light inside the barn, Jenny took in sights and smells familiar to her from summers spent at her grandparents' farm. She knew well the odors of dust, farm animals and their feed, manure, hay and straw, and the oiled leather of saddles, bridles, and other riding gear and harness.

Grandpa stopped at a stall where his pet mare stood looking out over the half-door. "Blaze is my favorite to ride," said Jenny, "and I liked taking care of her this past summer." Grandpa knew that riding had helped ease Jenny's unexpected bout of homesickness.

Jenny and Matt peeked in to see the foal totter about on long, shaky legs. His soft, gleaming hide was reddish-brown in color, like his mother's. His face was picture perfect--a Disney colt, with large, dark eyes, long eyelashes, and a white patch on his forehead.

"Can we pet him, Grandpa?" asked Matt. Jenny piped up, in big-sister fashion, "His mom might not like it."

"Better wait till he's a bit bigger, I think," said Grandpa.

Grandma's hens had followed Jenny and Matt into the barn, clucking and looking for a handout. They usually scratched in the dust outside, and liked to fluff their feathers and settle into any "dust bowl" they found. Jenny named the kinds of hens for Matt, "See, there are Rhode Island Reds, white Leghorns, and gray speckled Wyandottes. When they're baby chicks they are cute and fluffy,

but you need to keep clear of grownup roosters. They'll chase you, and their beaks are really sharp."

Gathering eggs from the hens' nests had been one of Jenny's summer jobs. She had handled the eggs carefully so they didn't break. "I was so scared the day I found a big blacksnake in a nest!" she recalled. "I screamed and ran, and dropped my basket! Grandpa came running to make sure I was OK."

"Jenny, a blacksnake won't hurt you, even if it looks scary," Grandpa had told her. "Bring me a burlap bag from the feed room, and we can coax him into it. Then we'll let him out into the woods." By the time they had relocated the snake, Jenny's fear had subsided—though she "never wanted to meet another snake in a hen's nest!" But with caution, and knowing she was facing a harmless snake, she could cope with it—and what a story to tell her friends at home!

Glancing at the darkening sky, Grandpa said, "The storm is moving in! It's time for us to say goodbye to the foal for now, and get ourselves up to the house. You can help your grandmother bake pies for tomorrow's dinner. All your aunts and uncles, plus fifteen cousins, will be here. We could ask them to help name the new colt!"

He rolled the barn door shut and grabbed his straw hat as the wind tried to send it sailing. "Run on, I'm right behind you!"

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