

Years 7 & 8
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Year 7, John Calvin Christian College

Through a Chicken's Eyes

I knew my mother would call. She always calls at this time of the day. Her high-pitched screechy voice would reach the corner of any yard. Our yard though was 2 acres and I could still hear her calling from the farthest distance away possible. I wouldn't be surprised if my best friend Chad could hear her screaming from his house 25 blocks away.

I sighed. There was no escaping the call. I had tried once before. The memory of the beating from my brutal father made me think twice about ignoring her once more.

I bolted from my position at the far-left corner of the yard and tossed my sling shot and air rifle into the shade of the nearby sycamore fig tree. I covered the distance to the house in a mere 15 seconds. Having not even broken a sweat, I slid into the kitchen. I mentally reminded myself to come back later to retrieve them.

"Peter James Yelnats!" my mother snapped as she wiped sweat from her brow. I sighed.

"Take these scraps to the chooks and make it snappy!"

A bit rich coming from her, I thought, listening to her snap continuously at me day after day. I grabbed the heaped bowl of assorted off-cuts and made a quick exit.

"The less time I spend within earshot of orders the better my afternoon would be," I muttered under my breath as I headed for the chook pen. "I'd rather be a chook," I thought, as I watched them hunt and peck. They never had anyone squawking at them and barking orders at them. They got to rest when they felt like, eat when they felt like and laze the day away.

I unlatched the gate leading into the chook pen as I watched the dozens of Plymouth Rock chickens bustling towards me. As I was about to empty the scraps into the waiting beaks, my step into the pen was disrupted by an out of place wooden plank. I plunged forward. I landed face first into the vile, fly-infested dirt of these feathered pets. Darkness overcame me as the water dispenser swayed to the left and returned to knock me straight in the head.

I awoke to find myself strangely perched on a little round pole.

"That's odd," I thought, "how can I balance so well on such a thin little railing?"

The noises around seemed bizarre as well. It wasn't the normal sounds of Mum cooking breakfast, but rather a consistent knocking sound with an occasional sound like a sick librarian calling for books. It more sounded like "bock" though, instead of "book". The smell was the only thing that I recognised. In addition to this, everything seemed a lot bigger than it was before I blacked out.

Attempting to look at the time on my watch seemed hard. I couldn't get my arm up any higher than my waist. Then I realised I had no ordinary arm. It was a brown feathery wing. It just couldn't be could it? I looked down at my feet and body. Strangely it matched my new arm. My feet now had three toes which were not at all the same. They spread out in different directions and were yellow and wrinkly. They were no longer feet, but were claws.

All of sudden one thing did sound familiar. It was a voice calling.

"Peter James Yelnats, come here at once. What are you doing out in the yard at this time of the morning? If you're hiding, come out at once if you want to avoid another beating from your father."

It didn't sound so screechy anymore, plus a bit later there were more voices calling my name.

By this stage I had fallen from my perch and realised I could walk on these weird legs. I kind of waddled from under the cover of the sleeping hut inside the pen to out in the open air. The sunlight temporarily removed my vision. After I had gathered my senses, I went over to the mesh barrier of the chook pen and peered through its gaps to see where the source of the commotion was coming from. Then I saw, on the porch of our house, only about 25 metres away, was my mother and father. They were still yelling and screaming my name, craning their necks to try to spot where I was hiding. They would never find me though, not if I stayed in the state that I was in at this current moment. This is because I had transformed into a feathery, flea-bitten, fly-surrounded pet having to live on feral chook food and table scraps.

I tried to get their attention by yelling out as loudly as I could and, as a further addition to my commotion, I flapped my newly sprouted wings up and down. I also noticed that mother and father were not the only ones searching the backyard of 27 Fremont Street in Cape Town, South Africa. Standing about 5 metres behind Mum and Dad were two dark skinned men, both decked out in a blue uniform complete with a badge standing out on their shirt pocket, a pair of dark sunglasses, and strangest of all, a big black revolver hanging on their brown leather belts. Who could these crazy looking men be? Were they going to shoot me? Then it hit me. They were Police. I don't know why, but I kind of felt bad that they were looking for me.

Reality began to sink in for the first time since I received my chicken features. I am a chicken, stuck in my backyard's very own chook pen, and my parents, who are just metres away from me, have called the police to carry out a search for their 'missing child', one they apparently 'love' so much. The door of the pen is locked, leaving me no escape from this awful, stinky heap of chook infested filth. Then a horrible realisation came to my mind. Christmas is just two days away. This is usually the best day of the year, but now I am dreading it. Why? Christmas dinner for our family consists of the fattest chicken of the two dozen in our pen rather than an expensive turkey.

I need a plan. I know already I am right up there with the fattest chickens in this bunch. How can I return to being the boy I was? I've actually decided I would happily answer my mother's bidding and calling, even if it interrupts my play.

I have a strange feeling that if I transformed into this hideous creature by going into the chook pen, I might be able to change back to myself by exiting the chook pen. I flap my wings to try to elevate out of the pen, but then realise that chickens are one of the rare birds that cannot fly. There is only one opportunity for me to escape. With the real me not being around, someone will need to feed the scraps to the chooks. To do that, they'll have to open the door. I expect it is near lunch time judging by the position of the sun. Sure enough, about twenty minutes later I see my Dad sauntering out of the house and heading towards my new residence inside the chook pen. This is my only chance to show him where I am. I squawk and flap my wings as he opens the pen. I see him stumble. Will he become a chook too? But he doesn't fall like I did. I try to escape and I see him lift his foot and swing it back ready to boot me back into the dirty filth. I try a manoeuvre, making a beeline for the corner of the door frame. I can feel the whoosh of air against my feathers as his foot comes within a millimetre of kicking me back to where I started. I manage to run through the entrance to the pen and half run, half fly, as fast as I can. Knowing my Dad, a 52-year-old who has a bung leg, I am certain he'll never catch me. I hear him cursing and then giving up the chase.

I have passed the first hurdle. I must conquer the next. I know my parents will have afternoon tea soon, so I must be fast. As I am heading towards the main entry to our house, a thought hits me. My mother will be in the house preparing afternoon tea. She will not only hear the scraping of my claws against the floor tiles of the house, but will see me running past the kitchen into my bedroom. I need to take a different approach. Then I remember the bathroom door. It is my only hope of getting into the house undetected. I just hope it is open. I make a run for the corner of the house where the bathroom door is located. I catch my first glimpse of the fly trap door. It is slightly ajar, leaving just enough room for me to squeeze into the house. I sneak past the door and into the house. A refreshing gust of conditioned air ruffles my feathers as relief floods into me. I dash along the hallway, turn the corner, and feel the soft carpet of my bedroom floor under my feet. I am so relieved I actually close my eyes to soak in the achievement I have just made. That's when my head met the metal frame of my bed and, for the second time in as many days, I blacked out.

I woke up with a splash of freezing cold water and a familiar, screechy voice yelling into my ear.

"Peter James Yelnats!" my mother snaps as she wipes sweat from her brow.

"Take these scraps to the chooks and make it snappy!"

I looked down at my body, expecting feathers and fleas, but they were not there. I check the time. It is the morning before Christmas. I was back. I had accomplished a mission that was nearly impossible, and I am the Peter Yelnats of before. Despite this though, I sighed. "Here we go again," I thought. Shall I risk another exhilarating adventure? Sometimes the chook option does sound better than living here . . .