

The Tale of Jemima Puddle Duck

by Beatrix Potter adapted by EveryReader

Adapted to Lexile Level 600





It is a funny sight to see ducklings with a hen. This is the story of Jemima Puddle-Duck. She was upset because the farmer's wife would not let her hatch her own eggs.



Her sister-in-law was Mrs. Rebeccah Puddle-Duck. She did not mind letting someone else hatch the eggs. 'I do not have the patience to sit for twenty-eight days,' she said.



'And neither do you, Jemima. You would let the eggs get cold.' 'I want to hatch my own eggs,' quacked Jemima. 'I will do it by myself.'



She tried to hide her eggs, but they were always found and taken away. Jemima became desperate. She decided to make a nest far from the farm.



One fine spring afternoon, she set off along the cart road over the hill. She wore a shawl and a bonnet.



At the top of the hill, she saw a wood in the distance. It looked like a safe and quiet place. Jemima did not fly very often.



She ran downhill, flapped her shawl, and jumped into the air. With a good start, she flew well. She skimmed over the treetops until she saw an open space.



The trees there had been cleared. Jemima landed with a heavy thump and began to waddle around. She looked for a dry place to nest.



She liked a tree stump among some tall foxgloves. But on the stump sat a gentleman in fine clothes, reading a newspaper.



He had pointed black ears, light brown whiskers, and a long, bushy tail. He was sitting on his tail because the stump was damp. He looked very much like a fox.



'Quack?' said Jemima, tipping her head to one side. The gentleman looked up over his newspaper. 'Madam, have you lost your way?' he asked.



Jemima thought he was very polite and handsome. She said she was not lost. She was trying to find a dry, safe place to make a nest.



'Is that so?' said the gentleman with sandy whiskers. He folded his paper and put it in his coat pocket. Jemima complained about the bossy hen at the farm.



'How interesting!' he said. 'I wish I could meet that hen. I would teach her to mind her own business.'



'As for a nest, there is no trouble at all.' 'I have a sack of feathers in my woodshed.' 'You will not be in anyone's way.' 'You may sit there as long as you like.'



He led her to a small, hidden house among the foxgloves. It was built of sticks and grass. Two broken buckets, one on top of the other, made the chimney. 'This is my summer home,' he said kindly.



'You would not find my winter house so convenient.' There was a shed in the back made of old soap boxes. The gentleman opened the door and showed Jemima inside.



The shed was almost full of feathers. It felt close and stuffy, but it was soft and comfortable. Jemima was surprised to see so many feathers, but she made a nest very easily.



When she came out, the gentleman was sitting on a log. His newspaper was spread out, but he was looking over the top of it. He was so polite that he seemed sorry to let her go home for the night.



He promised to take good care of her nest until she came back the next day. He said he loved eggs and ducklings. He would be proud to see a fine nest full of eggs in his shed.



Jemima came every afternoon. She laid nine large, greenish-white eggs. The foxy gentleman admired them very much.



When Jemima was not there, he turned them over and counted them. At last Jemima said she would begin to sit the next day. 'I will bring a bag of corn so I never need to leave the nest until the eggs hatch,' she said. 'They might get cold.'



'Please do not trouble yourself,' said the gentleman. 'I will provide oats.' 'But before you begin your long sitting, I want to give you a treat.' 'Let us have a little dinner, just the two of us.'



'Will you bring some herbs from the farm garden to make a tasty omelet?' 'Sage and thyme, mint, two onions, and some parsley.' 'I will provide lard for the omelet.'



Jemima was simple and did not grow suspicious, even when he asked for sage and onions. She went around the farm garden and picked small bits of the herbs used to stuff roast duck. She waddled into the kitchen and took two onions from a basket.



The collie dog, Kep, met her as she came out. 'What are you doing with those onions?' 'Where do you go every afternoon by yourself, Jemima Puddle-Duck?'



Jemima was a little afraid of the collie, so she told him the whole story. Kep listened with his wise head on one side. He grinned when she described the polite gentleman with sandy whiskers.



He asked questions about the wood and the exact place of the house and the shed. Then he trotted down to the village to look for two foxhound puppies. They were out walking with the butcher.



On the last sunny afternoon, Jemima went up the road again. She carried bunches of herbs and the two onions in a bag. She flew over the wood and landed near the gentleman's house.



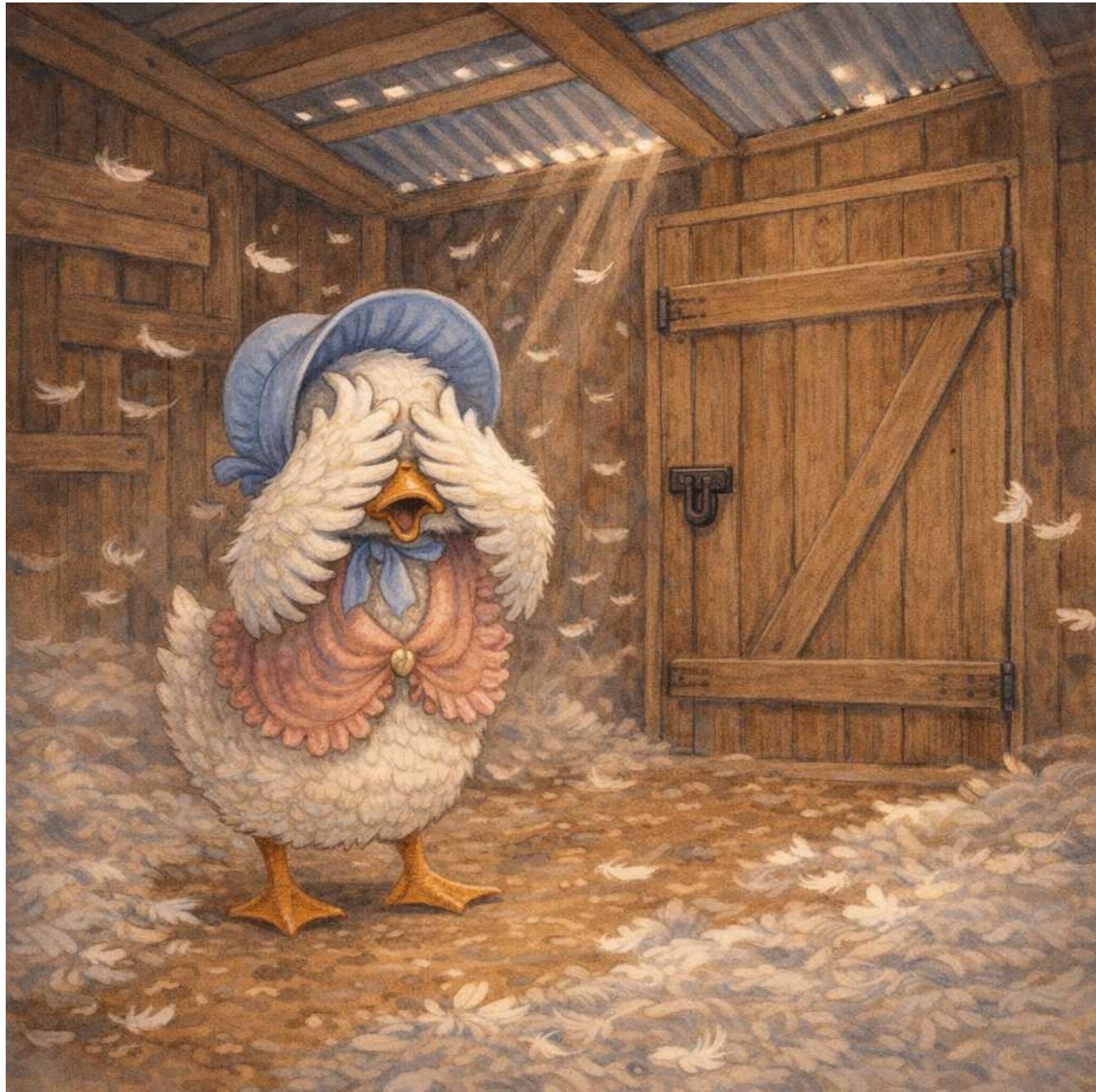
He was sitting on a log, sniffing the air and looking around. When Jemima landed, he jumped. 'Go in and look at your eggs,' he said. 'Bring me the herbs for the omelet. Be quick!'



His voice was sharp. Jemima had never heard him talk like that. She felt surprised and uneasy.



While she was inside, she heard feet pattering around the back of the shed. A black nose sniffed at the bottom of the door, and then the door was fastened. Jemima became very frightened.



A moment later there were terrible sounds. There was barking, baying, growling, and howling, with squeals and groans. The gentleman with the sandy whiskers was never seen again.



Soon Kep opened the shed door and let Jemima out. Sadly, the puppies rushed in and ate all the eggs before he could stop them. Kep had a bite on his ear, and both puppies were limping.



Jemima cried as they walked her home because her eggs were gone. She laid more eggs in June, and she was allowed to keep them this time. Only four of them hatched. Jemima said it was because of her nerves, but she had never been a very good sitter.