

“CHICKEN GOES TO THE BUTCHER”

By Alexander G. Tozzi

Henny didn't know what the butcher was, but each day the farmer came out to the coop and brought one of the chickens—not an egg-laying chicken, like her—to the butcher. Through the bars of her tin cage, Henny flustered her wings jealously as the farmer's beat-up blue pickup truck carried another chicken off to the butcher.

If any hen was to go to the butcher, shouldn't it be she?

At night she was let in to the barn, and while the other hens snored, she paced the hay-strewn floor of the barn clucking to herself, wondering exactly what this butcher was. Images of the free-range chickens being adorned with blue ribbons and fed endless bowls of corn entered her mind. And who gave all those wonderful things to the hens? A stout, baldheaded man with shiny glasses, wearing an immaculate sash which—to her chicken mind—said, THE BUTCHER.

Henny flustered her wings and nearly cackled with indignation. Surely this **MUST** be what a butcher was. And on top of that, it was a downright crime that she, **SHE** of all this farm's hens was not to be sent to the butcher.

Well, she decided, settling in to her scratchy nest. If the farmer won't bring me to the butcher then I suppose I'll have to bring myself.

And that was just what she did.

The following morning, when the farmer came to bring the egg-layers to their outside cages, Henny dug her beak into the frail old man's crusty hands, and as the farmer yelped in pain, she flew out of his weakened grasp, and, clucking excitedly, she ran down the dirt road, following the tracks of the farmer's truck.

If I follow the tracks, she reasoned, I'll find the butcher.

Following the tracks brought her to town, where the road was made of grey brick and rows of distinct buildings ran on

both of the road's sides. Henny was a bit flustered, staring through windows at clothes, pipes, and stacks of gold, and questioned her haste in fleeing the farm. Finding the butcher was harder than it seemed.

Thankfully there were animals here in town, and after consulting with a family of alley mice Henny learned that the butcher resided in a two-story building whose wide front window was decorated with decals of cows, pigs, and chickens like herself.

Henny beamed as she walked down the road. This butcher must have good taste, she told herself, to decorate his abode with pictures of me!

In no time at all she found the butcher's red-brick building, and spent a good deal of time admiring the decal of a plump white chicken who bore a great resemblance to herself. Almost as awe-striking, she decided, but not quite. She then had enough admiring her kind, and stepped into the open door of the butcher's place.

Ribbons and corn, here I come!

At entering the place Henny was overwhelmed by a strong miasma which stung her beak. What is that horrible smell? she wondered, scratching with her foot. It was reminiscent of the smell which often wafted from the farmer's house the evening after he walked a pig by her coop.

Henny adjusted to the smell as she did when it came to her at the coop, and sprinted about the butcher's place, noting with a wandering eye the shelves upon which were stacked links of brown, tubular things which smelled spicy, and cocking her head at glass cases filled with round blobs of red, gooey stuff, laid out in grass.

The butcher's was a most peculiar place.

Then she heard singing, a deep, baritone voice, which must have been the butcher, coming from the back room. Henny rushed toward the door at the end of the shop. As the man sang there came intermittent 'thwack'. . . 'thwacks', as of a sharp object hitting a hard surface.

Henny didn't care what those sounds were, and for that matter she could do without the butcher's singing. She ran as fast as she could to the door with a poster pinned to it, saying to herself, over and over, Ribbons and corn, ribbons and corn, ribbons and corn!

At the door she peeked her head through the opening and saw the butcher. The man was NOTHING like what she'd imagined. Rather than stout and bald-headed, the man a few feet away was more plump than the farmer's fattest pig, and his head, though bald, was sweating profusely. A seedy handlebar mustache shed hair onto the cutting board in front of him.

What is on that board? Henny wondered, and she ducked in a bit further.

The butcher, singing a loud crescendo now, brought up a weighty, curved blade which shone in the lamp light. Henny squawked as the man brought it down. . . to chop off the head of a dead, plucked chicken!

Henny could not control her panicked squawking, and was flustering her feathers in a stupor. THIS was the butcher!? THIS was what the farmer did with those free-range chickens? She didn't have time to see the justice in those pompous hens having their heads chopped off by this man-pig, because the man-pig noticed her!

"A-ha!" the fat man cheered, twisting the ends of his mustache. "I see I've got myself a live one. Here, chicky, chicky, chicky!" And before she knew it, the plump man was tumbling after Henny, waving his bloody knife like a toy.

Henny let out a squawk of pure fright, and rushed away from the butcher's back room. She could hear the man's footsteps pounding right behind her. For a fatso he moved fast! "Here, chicky, chicky! I must choppa your head!"

Not today, you're not! And with a furious flapping of her wings she bounded onto a shelf full of those links she'd seen. Planting her feet on them she gulped, realizing them to be dead cows, or pigs.

The butcher was fast, but he was too fat to come to a good

stop. "Ai-ie-ie-ie!" he screamed, as though her were singing again. He crashed right into the shelf, knocking it and all behind it over in a domino effect. Henny flew off just in time.

With an annoyed squawk she landed at the entrance. That was close. She stared for a moment at the butcher. The rolly-polly man had lost his knife, and his dignity. He rolled over, groaning. He pet his sore and sweaty head. Seeing Henny he perked up and grabbed a link of dead cows-or pig. Waving it like a knife, he said, "Here, chicky, chicky! I choppa your head off!"

Henny ruffled her feathers and left the butcher's place.

It was a long walk home she had, and she spent that whole trip fuming to herself. When she arrived, the farmer, probably not recognizing her, placed her in a fresh cage. The next morning the farmer came again to take a free-range chicken to the butcher's. Henny flustered her wings and watched as the beat-up, blue pick-up truck brought that free-ranger to the butcher's to meet its doom.

If any hen was to go go to the butcher's, it should NOT be her.

THE END