

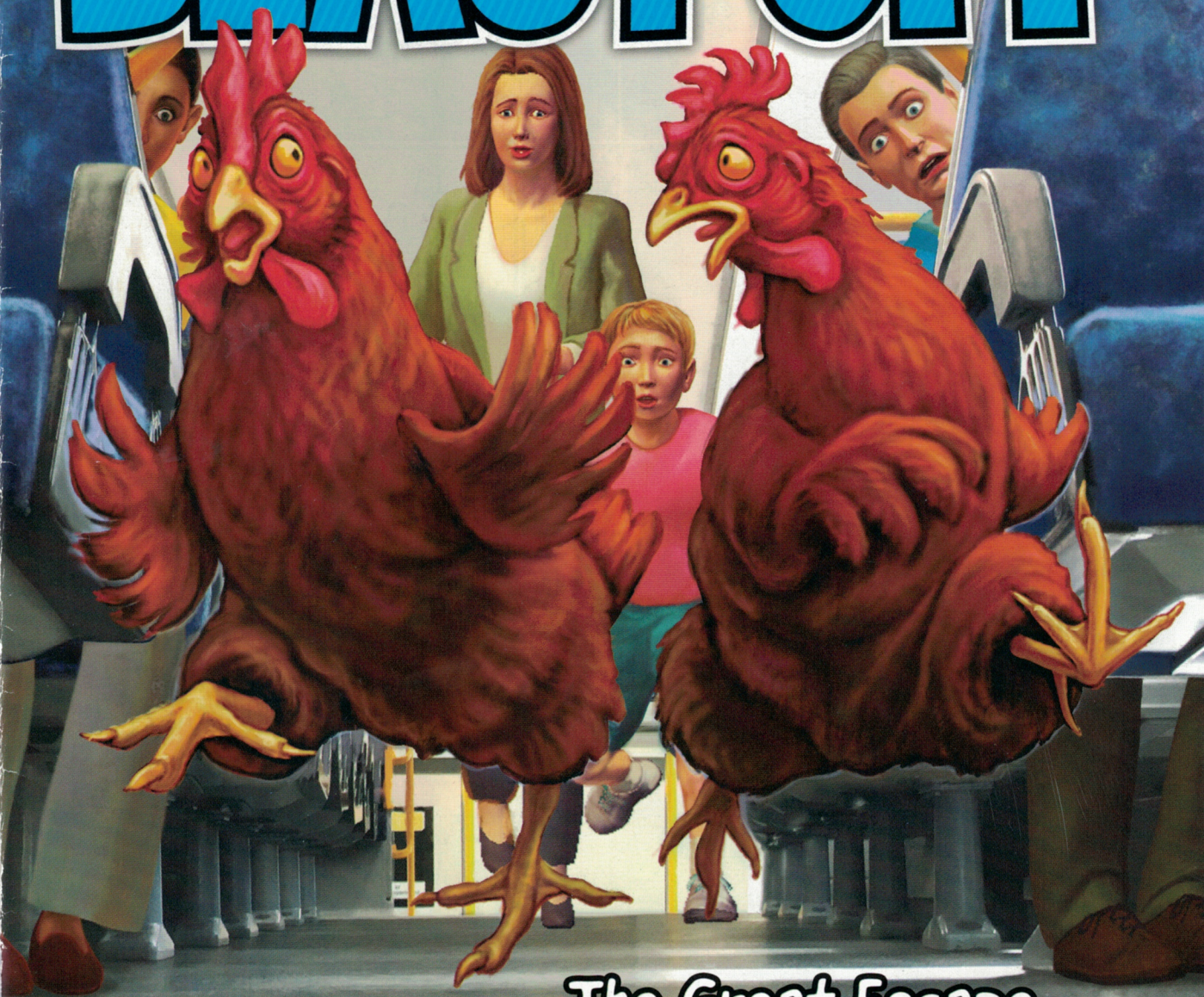


The School Magazine

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BLAST OFF



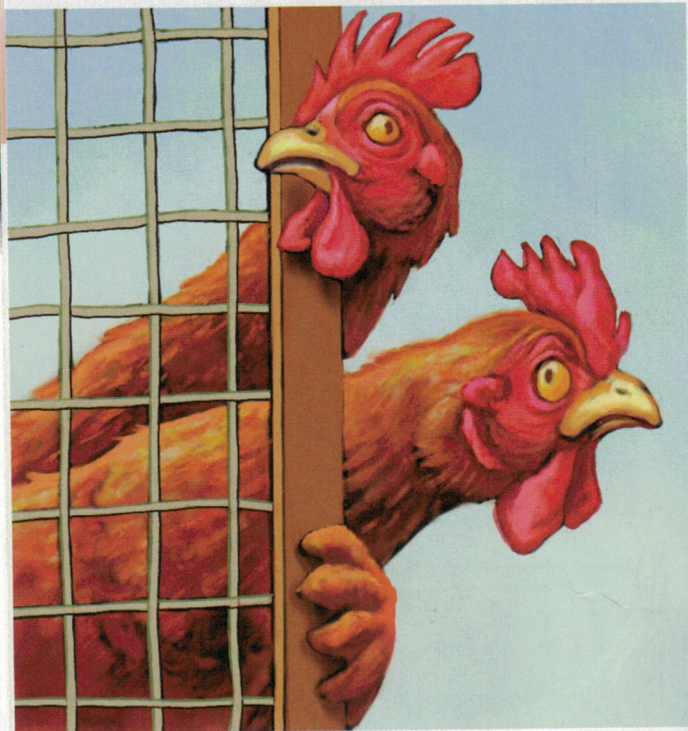
The Great Escape

Blaaark!

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The Great Chicken Getaway

story by Marian McGuinness | illustrated by David Legge



BETTY AND BABS were best friends.

They did everything together at Old Macdonald's Primary School.

Their coop was a masterpiece. It was like a Taj Mahal for chickens. It had ladders to run up, dangling chicken drinkers for when they were thirsty and swings made of old tree branches, where they rocked themselves to sleep.

Every morning, after the children went into class, the chickens were allowed out to scratch in the school

garden. They scavenged beak-by-beak, searching for grubs, bugs and other juicy morsels that took their fancy.

Betty and Babs loved to share their dust bath. They scratched and fluttered. They whooshed dirt in every direction until their feathers were speckled with grit and sand.

Their chicken life was mostly peaceful, and all the children loved them. But sometimes they loved the chickens too much.

At lunchtime, the children couldn't wait to play with the chickens. They patted and petted them.

They cuddled and snuggled them. They tickled and teased them.

Bucketty ... buck ... buck ... buck ... clucked Betty every night after the school day had finished.

Bucketty ... buck ... buck ... buck ... clucked Babs, as they huddled high on their roosts, resting before the next day started.

One windy morning, long before the school bell rang, the gate to their coop swung open. It banged on its hinges, sending the two chickens into a frenzy.

Betty and Babs clucked to each other.

They padded up to the gate and looked out: left, right.

They clucked again ... and then they ... *vamoosed!*

Nobody noticed them scramble across the playground.

Nobody noticed them scurry up the school driveway.

And nobody noticed as they strutted down the street.

They sprinted over the pedestrian crossing and dashed across the overhead bridge. Cars tooted and trucks honked their horns as the chickens made their getaway. Soon they were sauntering along the footpath at the shopping centre, their claws clacking on the concrete.

After pecking in the doggie water bowl outside the florist shop and

snacking on a couple of caterpillars hiding in the pot plants, Betty and Babs continued their adventure.

They promenaded past the post office, hustled past the butcher shop and ogled through the window of the optometrist.

Bucketty ... *buck ... buck ... buck ...* clucked Betty when they stopped outside Henny Penny's Chicken Kitchen.

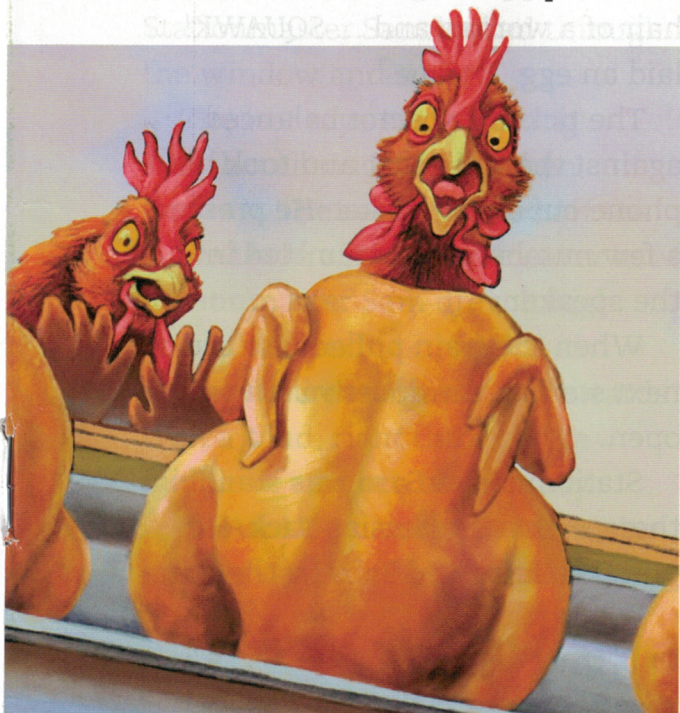
Bucketty ... *buck ... buck ...* BWAAARK! clucked Babs, staring at the golden-skinned chickens glistening in the window.

Betty and Babs squawked and flapped their wings. Something was terribly wrong, and they weren't going to hang around to find out what. It was time to *skeddadle!*

After running what seemed like a chicken marathon, they ended up at the train station.

The station was so busy with people racing for trains, that nobody noticed the two chickens hide beside a wheeie suitcase and scamper under the turnstile. And nobody noticed them hop on the escalator creaking its way down, down, down into the dark of Platform 5.

Betty and Babs hid in the shadows, looking around for where to run next on their great escape.



They squawked when the train rumbled into the station.

Vwoomp went the carriage doors. The two chooks clucked and jumped on board.

They darted between stepping feet and hid under a seat.

Bucketty ... buck ... buck ... buck ... clucked Betty, when the train rattled off.

Bucketty ... buck ... buck ... buck ... clucked Babs sitting down to rest.

The two chooks jiggled and wobbled as the train sped down the track. When it rounded a bend, some runaway grapes rolled under the seats in their direction.

Betty and Babs clucked with delight before they tucked into the juicy green goodies.



'Mummy, there are CHICKENS on the train!' squealed a little boy, peering under his seat.

The high-pitched voice frightened Betty and Babs. They zigzagged under the seats and bolted down the aisle.

Now EVERYBODY noticed them!

The little boy gave chase.

'I'm allergic to feathers,' cried a lady, covering her nose with a handkerchief.

'I'll catch them,' yelled a man trying to hook the chickens with a walking stick.

Feathers flew as everyone in the carriage joined in the chase until there was pandemonium!

Betty fluttered up onto the luggage rack. She did a long dropping poop that landed on a bald man's head.

Babs flapped up onto the feathery hair of a woman and ... SQUAWK! ... laid an egg.

The ticket inspector balanced against the train seat and took his phone out of his pocket. He pressed a few numbers and mumbled into the speaker.

When the train pulled into the next station, the doors *vwoomped* open.

Stationmaster Sam was standing there with a big hessian sack. He grabbed Betty and Babs by the feet.

He plonked them headfirst into the sack and took them home.

Stationmaster Sam let the chickens run free in his backyard. They chased each other through the bushes, pecked at scraps littered around the compost pile and flew up onto the seat of an old swing that hung from a tree.

As dusk came, they wandered around, wondering where they would roost for the night.

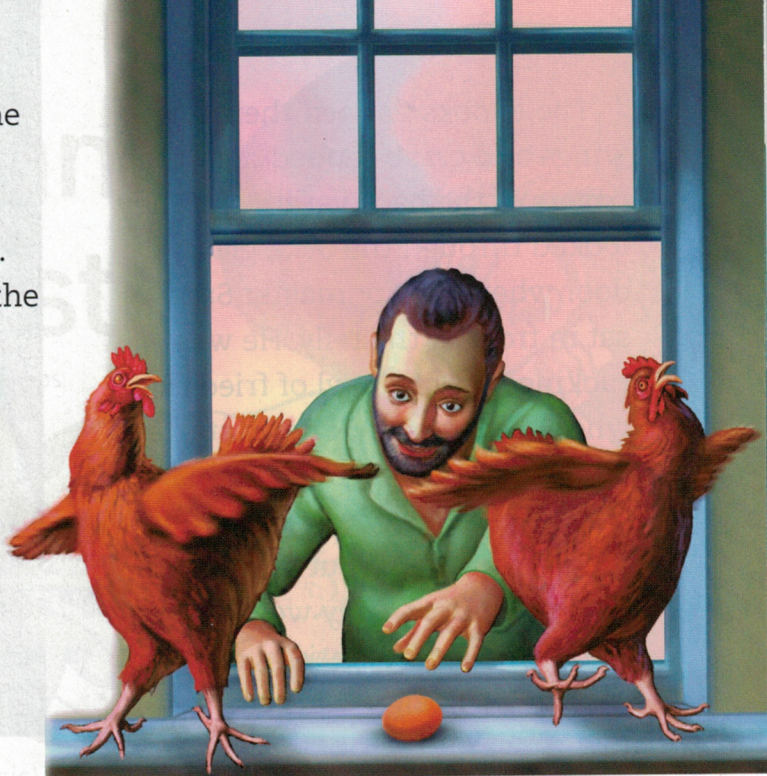
They flew onto the top of the barbecue on the back verandah and settled on the wide ledge of the kitchen window.

The two chooks peered through the glass. Stationmaster Sam was in his pyjamas. He was standing next to the sink and preparing dinner. The wok was sizzling and he was sharpening his meat cleaver. Stationmaster Sam looked through the window and smiled.

The last rays of the setting sun shot through the kitchen window. The rays reflected off the silver blade of the meat cleaver as Stationmaster Sam drew it high above his head.

He sliced the cleaver downwards with a thud, right through the middle of a bunch of bok choy.

BWAAARK! clucked Babs, as she jumped.



SQUAWK! clucked Betty, laying an egg on the windowsill.

Stationmaster Sam opened the window and reached towards Betty and Babs. They cackled like crazy and fluttered around trying to avoid his grasp.

Stationmaster Sam picked up the egg and held it towards the kitchen light. It glistened like a brown Christmas bauble.

He cracked the egg in half against the side of the wok, and whisked its contents into the hissing wok of bok choy and fried rice.

Bucketty ... buck ... buck ... buck clucked Babs.

BOK BAGOK! clucked Betty, tilting her head at her broken egg.

The chooks flapped their tiny wings and crash-landed onto the pavers of the back verandah. They looked through the back glass door where Stationmaster Sam sat in front of the telly. He was tucking into his bowl of fried rice when the six o'clock news started. Bits of cooked yolk stuck to his whiskery face as he watched the first news story about a group of schoolchildren. They were crying as they held up paintings of two chooks and a sign that read:



Betty and Babs were chicken-napped this morning from their coop at Old Macdonald's Primary School. If you've seen our beloved Betty and Babs please call Crime Busters.

Stationmaster Sam leaned towards the telly. His eyes narrowed. He looked sideways through the verandah door. Betty and Babs stared back at him. The moon glowed behind them, illuminating their feathery heads with little halos. He finished eating his fried rice and smiled.

The next morning, Stationmaster Sam made a phone call before popping Betty and Babs into a

cardboard box. He drove them all the way across town to Old Macdonald's Primary School.

When he arrived, a guard of honour was lining the length of the driveway. He let the chooks out of their cardboard box. They strutted beneath the overarched arms of the cheering children all the way to their coop—a coop as grand as the Taj Mahal.

The chooks were patted and petted, cuddled and snuggled, and tickled and teased.

Bucketty ... buck ... buck ... buck ... clucked Betty and Babs in happy unison.

And they all did the Chicken Dance.

Including Stationmaster Sam. ■

