

## DORTHY PREDMORE

### *Ducks on the Pond*

There are ducks on a neighboring farm pond this fall for the first time in well over a year. There have been ducks around the pond all this time, but not on it, and the reason for this unusual state of affairs is a story which should be pondered.

A city child had received three ducks and a chicken as Easter gifts, and the fuzzy fowls had lost their down and their welcome in their urban home at about the same time. What could have been more logical than to take them to a farm, especially one with a pond?

At the farm, the ducks headed for the water, but the chicken, a rooster, spread his immature wings and dive-bombed at the ducks, chasing them back until they finally accepted the fact that they were chickens, and should not swim. So they paraded single file around the shale banks of the mixing bowl pond, herded by the ubiquitous rooster.

The farm children, three boys and a girl, thought the whole thing was very funny until a warm day in June when they decided to go swimming. The rooster tried his best to stop them, lowering his head, fluffing his growing wings, and charging them with all his broiler-weight strength.

One by one the children broke loose and got to the pond, but the frustrated rooster would not give up. He enlarged his tyrannical domain to include any human being in sight, whether near the pond or not, until he became a nuisance to adults, and a terror to small children.

Finally, the ducks took over. It is one thing to give up your own freedom voluntarily, and quite another to stand by while freedom is taken forcibly from others. They rode herd on the rooster, keeping between him and his intended quarry, often biting at his neck until it bled, if he persisted.

A stalemate seemed to have been reached. The rooster saw to it that the ducks did not swim, and the ducks made certain that the rooster did not chase people. Such is often the fate of those who aspire to be leaders.

Surely those ducks must have wanted to swim! On a clear day in April or September when the white ringed mallards made flying wedges in the sky, the shale-bound ducks must have wanted to invite their wild cousins down to swim, or perhaps to fraternize.

On a still morning when the white pole barn and the color rampant hillside woods were inverted in the mirror smooth water, the ducks must have felt an urge to ripple the water, to dive for minnows or duckweed, to preen their dusty coats, or to sail nonchalantly out of reach of the rooster, But they resisted the impulses, and at what outrageous cost! How terrible to suppress your God-given talents. How awful to be a duck who cannot swim.

And the rooster. The poor rooster. Surely he must have wanted to chantic-leer the dawn, to strut on the lush front lawn instead of having to patrol a grassless circle. What a burden it must have been to try to keep three wives in line (or was it a wife, a mother, and a mother-in-law?), especially three who seemed to have no idea at all about how chicken womenfolk are supposed to behave.

If his behavior had been motivated by genuine concern for the safety of the ducks, or even from the economic necessity of keeping the pond full of clean clear water, it would have been admirable. But the truth was that the rooster, like all tyrants, was driven by fear. Because he was afraid of water, he decided that water was bad for everyone. The more the fear possessed him, the more determined he was to control everything around him.

After more than a year of the deadlock, the farmer, when sending his caged layers to market, decided to send the rooster along.

That evening the ducks went swimming. They waddled casually down to the pond and went swimming as naturally as though they had been doing it all their lives. They seemed no more to remember or regret their recent restriction than a mountain stream recalls its frozen origin.

Only the children remembered. And wondered.

