

STONECROP FARM PRESENTS

THE GOOSE

A TALE FROM YOUR LOCAL ORGANIC FARMERS



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CHAPTER 1: THE GOOSE

OUR FIRST YEAR FARMING, A FRIEND GAVE US A GOOSE. WE HAD A FOX PROBLEM AT THE TIME, AND OUR HOPE WAS THAT THIS GOOSE WOULD STAND GUARD AND HELP PROTECT OUR CHICKENS.

IT SOUNDED LIKE A FOOLPROOF PLAN TO ME, THOUGH I WILL ADMIT I KNEW NEXT TO NOTHING ABOUT FARMING AT THE TIME. WE ENCOUNTERED A FEW PROBLEMS IMMEDIATELY. FOR STARTERS, THIS GOOSE DIDN'T SEEM TO HAVE A PROTECTIVE BONE IN HIS BODY. AND HIS GOOSE GIRLFRIEND, WHO CAME WITH HIM, WASN'T ANY BETTER.

WHEN THE FEMALE GOOSE LAID HER FIRST EGG, WE WERE AMAZED. AFTER MARVELING AT ITS SIZE - EASILY 4 TIMES THE SIZE OF OUR USUAL CHICKEN EGGS - GREG DECIDED TO DO WHAT HE DOES WITH OTHER EGGS FROM THE FARM. HE FRIED IT, OVER-EASY AND IT WAS A ROOKIE CULINARY MISTAKE FOR ALL THE REASONS YOU'RE ENVISIONING.

GOOSE EGGS, WE QUICKLY LEARNED, WERE NOT OUR CUP-OF-TEA. SO WE DECIDED IT WOULD BE BEST TO HAVE NATURE TAKE ITS COURSE AND LET THE EGGS HATCH. WE RELOCATED THE GEESE, MOVING THEM AWAY FROM THE HENS THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO PROTECT AND INTO A NEW Paddock IN THE BACKYARD.

GREG BUILT THEM A LITTLE WOODEN HOUSE AND GAVE THEM A KIDDIE POOL SHAPED LIKE A TURTLE, AND SET UP A FENCE AROUND THEM. THEY ATE OUR DANDELIONS AND POOPED EVERYWHERE AND MATED A LOT.

GREG SAID IT WOULD BE TEMPORARY, "JUST UNTIL THE GOSLINGS HATCH," AND GOOGLE TOLD ME WHAT WOULD COME NEXT.

SHE'D BUILD A NEST, LAY A SMALL CLUTCH OF EGGS, SIT ON THEM FOR ABOUT A MONTH AND THEN THE FUZZY LITTLE GOSLINGS WOULD ARRIVE. HOW DELIGHTFUL!

WE WATCHED AS SHE MADE HER NEST AND STARTED LAYING THOSE EGGS - 18 TO BE EXACT - BUT SHE WOULD NOT SIT. DURING THIS TIME, WE WERE SHOCKED TO SEE THAT THE MALE FINALLY DEVELOPED THOSE PROTECTIVE INSTINCTS WE HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR MONTHS AGO.

ON SECOND THOUGHT, PROTECTIVE, MIGHT NOT BE THE BEST WORD TO DESCRIBE HIS BEHAVIORS. HE HISSED AND FLAPPED HIS WINGS WHEN WE WALKED OUT OF THE HOUSE AND CHARGED AT US AND OUR FRIENDS. HE WAS ANYTHING BUT PLEASANT. BASICALLY, HE WAS VICIOUS AND HATED OUR GUTS AND IF I HADN'T KNOWN BETTER, I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT HE HAD AN AVIAN VERSION OF RABIES.

BUT STILL, NO SITTING. WE SAW THE WEATHER FORECAST ONE NIGHT - TEMPERATURES IN THE LOW 20S THAT WOULD SURELY FREEZE THOSE EGGS - AND WE HAD TO INTERVENE! AFTERALL, THE LITTLE GOSLINGS WE ENVISIONED ROAMING THE FARM WOULD NEVER COME TO FRUITION IF THE EGGS FROZE SOLID.

WE LOST HOPE THAT THESE GEESE WOULD EVER BE AS INTERESTED IN GROWING THEIR BROOD THAN THEY WERE MATING IN THE POOL, SO WE DEvised A PLAN. WE WOULD NEED TO GET AROUND THE VICIOUS MALE AND THE INDIFFERENT FEMALE AND STEAL THE EGGS. AND THEN WE'D EITHER NEED TO FIND A WAY TO INCUBATE THE EGGS OURSELVES OR REPLACE THEM THE NEXT MORNING AND CONTINUE WAITING.

STEALING EGGS FROM GEESE THAT WERE NOW BIOLOGICALLY HARD-WIRED TO PROTECT THESE EGGS WAS NO EASY FEAT. IT INVOLVED CAREFUL PLANNING, DECOYS, AND COLLABORATION.

CHAPTER 2: THE HEIST

I'VE STOLEN THINGS BEFORE. WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, I STOLE CANDY FROM THE GROCERY STORE BY PUTTING HANDFULS UPON HANDFULS OF TOOTSIE ROLLS AND LOLLIPOPS DOWN MY PANTS. GREG APPARENTLY ONCE DID SOMETHING LIKE THIS, TOO, MINUS THE PANTS AND THE TRAIL OF CANDY LEFT BEHIND.

WITH WHAT LITTLE EXPERIENCE WE COLLECTIVELY HAD WITH SUCH THINGS, WE DEvised A PLAN. I WOULD BE THE DECOY, SINCE THE GOOSE HAD ALWAYS HATED ME THE MOST. AND GREG WOULD STEAL THE EGGS.

WE WAITED UNTIL AFTER DARK AND FOUND THE GEESE SITTING IN THE KIDDIE POOL, NESTLED UP BESIDE EACH OTHER. AS WE STARTED TO WALK TOWARD THEM, THE MALE IMMEDIATELY TURNED HIS GAZE TOWARD ME AND STARTED TO HISS AND RUFFLED UP HIS FEATHERS.

THIS WAS ALL PART OF OUR ROUTINE AT THIS POINT. HE WOULD EMPLOY HIS BEST INTIMIDATION TACTICS AND I WOULD TRY TO LOOK TOUGH, BUT AS HE HISSED AND SNAPPED AND CHARGED, I WOULD PANIC, SCREAM, AND START RUNNING (YES, THIS IS TRUE AND IS ALSO EMBARRASSING!).

THIS TIME THOUGH, THERE WOULD BE NO RUNNING. WE NEEDED TO GET OUR HANDS ON ALL 17 OF THE EGGS OR ELSE THE COLD TEMPS WOULD FREEZE THE EGGS. DETERMINED TO GIVE THE PERFORMANCE OF A LIFETIME SO GREG COULD SNATCH THOSE EGGS, I TOOK A PAGE OUT OF THE GOOSE'S PLAYBOOK.

I HISSED AND FLAPPED MY ARMS UP AND DOWN AND MADE SOUNDS THAT I TRULY DON'T THINK I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO DESCRIBE HERE. I HONKED AND WADDLED AND KICKED AND FLAILED AND DID JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING I COULD THINK OF TO LOOK BIG AND STRONG AND SCARY, LIKE HIM.

AS THIS EPIC FARM HEIST WAS TAKING PLACE BETWEEN THE GOOSE AND ME, GREG SNUCK BEHIND US, REACHED INTO THE HOUSE AND GRABBED THE EGGS. AFTER COLLECTING ALL 17, HE DASHED BACK TO THE HOUSE AND CALLED ME OFF. WE GOT THEM!

NEITHER OF US WERE SURE WHAT TO DO WITH THE EGGS AT THIS POINT. WE WEREN'T THE LEAST BIT INTERESTED IN EATING THEM (SEE LAST WEEK'S NEWSLETTER). AND WE STILL HAD A LITTLE BIT OF HOPE THAT MAYBE, SOMEHOW, WE WOULD HAVE GOSLINGS ON THE FARM.

WE SET THE EGGS OUT ON A TOWEL IN A COOL PLACE IN THE HOUSE AND ROTATED THEM EACH DAY UNTIL THE COLD WEATHER BROKE. THEN WE WENT THROUGH THIS WHOLE ORDEAL AGAIN TO RETURN THE EGGS BACK TO THE NEST AND WAITED.

AMAZINGLY, THE PLAN ALMOST WORKED....THE FEMALE LAID A FEW MORE AND THEN FINALLY AFTER WEEKS OF WAITING, SHE SAT ON HER CLUTCH! THAT IS, UNTIL THE FOX FOUND HER...

CHAPTER 3: THE DUEL

I'M NOT SURE HOW TO TELL YOU THIS. LORD KNOWS WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER SAD THING TO THINK ABOUT RIGHT NOW. BUT, IT HAPPENED THE DAY, OR RATHER THE NIGHT, AFTER THE FEMALE GOOSE FINALLY SAT ON HER EGGS. WE DISCOVERED ONLY THE REMNANTS OF THE SHELLS AND A PLUME OF HER REGAL BROWN SPECKLED FEATHERS. BUT WE KNEW WHAT HAD HAPPENED AND WE KNEW EXACTLY WHO DID IT.

THAT FIRST YEAR, THE FOXES TORMENTED US RELENTLESSLY, FINDING ALL SORTS OF WAYS TO BREAK US DOWN - BARRELING THROUGH THE ELECTRIC FENCES, BURYING BENEATH OUR ENCLOSURES, AND PICKING OFF ANIMALS LEFT AND RIGHT. LOSING THE GOOSE AND ALL THOSE EGGS, WAS ANOTHER DEVASTATING BLOW.

AS WE STRATEGIZED AND FIGURED OUT HOW TO BUMP UP OUR FARM'S DEFENSES, WE HOPED WE COULD BOND THE MALE GOOSE BACK TO OUR OTHER LIVESTOCK. AFTER ALL, HE HAD ALREADY PROVEN TO US THAT HE HAD THE RIGHT ATTITUDE. NOW WE JUST HAD TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO HELP HIM HARNESS IT FOR GOOD, INSTEAD OF EVIL.

ONE EVENING AFTER INTRODUCING HIM, YET AGAIN, TO OUR DUCKS, WE HEARD LOUD QUACKS AND SHRIEKS COMING FROM THE WINDOW. GREG SAID A SWEAR WORD OR TWO, SLIPPED ON HIS BOOTS AND WITH A FLASHLIGHT IN HAND, SPRINTED OUT THE FRONT DOOR. I RAN BEHIND HIM, KNOWING IN MY HEART THAT WE WERE PROBABLY TOO LATE. SURE ENOUGH, THE FOX WAS AT IT AGAIN.

IT WAS DARK, BUT I SAW EVERYTHING I NEEDED TO SEE - THE FOX LOCKED IN BATTLE WITH THE GOOSE. AS WE APPROACHED, THE FOX LET GO AND BACKED AWAY, JUST FAR ENOUGH AWAY TO BE OUT OF REACH, BUT KEEPING HIS PRESENCE KNOWN.

GREG SCOOPED UP THE GOOSE IN HIS ARMS. HE WAS LIMP, OUT OF BREATH, AND CLEARLY IN A STATE OF SHOCK, HIS EYES WIDE AND HIS HEART BEATING FAST. WE INSPECTED HIM CAREFULLY, NO OPEN WOUNDS THANKS TO HIS THICK FEATHERS, STRONG WINGS, AND INTIMIDATING DEMEANOR.

WE GAVE HIM WATER, PUT HIM IN A FOX-PROOF ENCLOSURE AND FEELING TOO EXHAUSTED TO MAKE ANY MORE DECISIONS FOR THE NIGHT, WENT TO SLEEP.

THE NEXT MORNING, WE WENT TO CHECK ON THE GOOSE, AND SOMETHING HAD CLEARLY SHIFTED. I LET HIM OUT AND INSTEAD OF ALL THE HONKING AND HISSING AND SNAPPING I HAD GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO, HE WAS BEING.....NICE? IT TURNED OUT TO BE MORE THAN THAT.

THIS WAS THE DAY THAT THE GOOSE BECAME MY SHADOW. FROM THAT DAY FORWARD, HE FOLLOWED ME AROUND THE FARM EVERYWHERE I WENT, LETTING OUT THE LITTLE SOFT MUSICAL HONKS.

HE SAT BESIDE ME WHEN I RESTED ON OUR HAMMOCK, WALKED ONTO OUR PORCH WHILE WE ATE BREAKFAST, AND EVEN FIGURED OUT HOW TO TURN HIS HEAD JUST ENOUGH SO HE COULD EYE ME THROUGH OUR WINDOWS AND TRACK ME AS I WALKED FROM ROOM TO ROOM.

THE ONLY EXPLANATION WE HAD FOR THIS WHOLE SITUATION WAS THAT HE HAD FOUND HIS NEW MATE AND OF ALL THE CREATURES ON THE FARM, HE CHOSE ME.

I WILL SAY THAT HAVING A GOOSE BONDED TO YOU IS AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE AND NOT ONE THAT I'D RECOMMEND.

CHAPTER 4: WINNING THE LOTTERY

EVENTUALLY, I STARTED TO GET THE FEELING THAT WE WERE IN OVER OUR HEADS. IT STARTED THE DAY I WENT OVER TO OUR NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE FOR A CHAT AND THE GOOSE TROTTED BEHIND ME, CROSSING THE ROAD AND FOLLOWING ME UP THE DRIVEWAY TO THEIR FRONT DOOR.

A FEW DAYS LATER, I GOT INTO MY CAR TO RUN SOME ERRANDS. TO MY SURPRISE, THE GOOSE HAD FOLLOWED ME OUT TO THE TOP OF OUR DRIVEWAY AND HE DIDN'T STOP THERE. HE CAME RIGHT UP TO THE DRIVER'S SIDE WINDOW AND LET OUT A FEW LOUD HONKS AS IF TO TELL ME I HAD FORGOTTEN TO INVITE HIM TO COME ALONG.

THERE WAS ANOTHER MOMENT, A LAST STRAW OF SORTS, THAT I WISH I DIDN'T FEEL SO COMPELLED TO SHARE. I WAS DOING LAUNDRY IN THE BASEMENT AND I REALIZED I NEEDED TO ADD THE CLOTHES I WAS WEARING TO THE WASH. I STRIPPED DOWN AND WHILE STANDING THERE NAKED, I GOT THAT STRANGE, EERIE FEELING YOU GET WHEN YOU KNOW YOU'RE BEING WATCHED.

SURE ENOUGH, THE GOOSE WAS RIGHT OUTSIDE THE BASEMENT WINDOW, PEERING IN THROUGH THE GLASS WITH HIS HEAD COCKED TO THE SIDE SO THAT JUST ONE OF HIS BEADY LITTLE EYES COULD WATCH ME. WE HAD A PEEPING-TOM!!!

HE NEEDED TO GO. AND TO NO SURPRISE, GREG WAS IN TOTAL AGREEMENT, ESPECIALLY AFTER HE DISCOVERED THAT THE GOOSE HAD PICKED UP A NEW HABIT OF SNATCHING OUR FRESHLY PLANTED VEGETABLE SEEDLINGS OUT OF THE GROUND AND EATING THEM BY THE ROOTS!

I TURNED TO CRAIGSLIST - THE SOLUTION TO RIDDING ONESELF OF ALL SORTS OF STRANGE THINGS - AND POSTED AN AD. WITHIN A 1/2 HOUR, MY INBOX STARTED TO BLOW UP.

"THAT'S ONE BEAUTIFUL GOOSE. I'D LIKE TO BREED HIM."
"I WANT TO SHOW HIM IN THE COUNTY FAIR. DO YOU THINK HE'S IN GOOD ENOUGH CONDITION TO BE A SHOW-ANIMAL? " "HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK HE WEIGHS? MY MOTHER LOVES GOOSE AND I'D LIKE TO MAKE HER A SPECIAL DINNER."

I TURNED DOWN ALL OF THOSE PROPOSITIONS, KNOWING THAT WE WERE DESPERATE, BUT NOT THIS DESPERATE. I WAITED FOR SOMETHING, OR RATHER SOMEONE, TO FEEL RIGHT. AND THEN IT HAPPENED.

I GOT AN EMAIL FROM A MAN WHO, IN A MATTER OF A FEW SHORT PARAGRAPHS AND ONE BRIEF PHONE CALL, CONVINCED ME THAT HE REALLY, TRULY, ABSOLUTELY, LOVED GEESE. AND THAT HE SHOULD BE THE GOOSE'S NEW CARETAKER.

HE TOLD ME HOW HE BUILT PONDS FOR HIS PET GEESE. HE TOLD ME ABOUT HOW HE INSTALLED 24-HR VIDEO SURVEILLANCE AND ELECTRIC FENCES TO DETER PREDATORS FOR HIS GEESE. AND HOW HE BROUGHT HIS GEESE FOR REGULAR CHECKUPS WITH AN AVIAN VET AND EVEN GREW NUTRITIOUS SPROUTS FOR HIS GEESE!

HE SEALED THE DEAL WITH THIS ONE LINE. "IF YOU LET ME HAVE YOUR GOOSE, IT'LL BE AS IF HE WON THE LOTTERY. THIS PLACE IS HEAVEN." HOW COULD I EVER TURN THAT DOWN?

2 HOURS LATER, THE MAN ARRIVED. AS I GEARED UP TO TELL HIM ABOUT HOW HE'D BETTER BE CAREFUL HANDLING THE GOOSE BECAUSE HE HAD MEAN STREAK, THE MAN SCOOPED UP THE GOOSE IN HIS ARMS LIKE A BABY AND CARRIED HIM TO HIS VAN. I WAS SURPRISED. THE GOOSE DIDN'T EVEN PROTEST...MUCH.

THE MAN DROVE AWAY WITH THE GOOSE IN THE BACK SEAT OF HIS VAN AND I FELT, ALL AT ONCE, RELIEVED AND SAD TO HAVE ABRUPTLY ENDED THIS STRANGE COCKEYED VENTURE OF OURS.

I TURNED TO LOOK AT GREG AND SAW THAT HE, TOO, HAD BIG TEARS WELLING UP IN HIS EYES. WE STOOD THERE IN OUR DRIVEWAY TOGETHER AND CRIED. AND LAUGHED. AND HUGGED. AND THEN...WE GOT BACK TO FARMING.

THE END

Written and shared with love,
Jenney & Greg