

# How to Build a Chicken Coop



A free Playing the Fool short  
story for members of Lisa Henry's  
Hangout,  
by Lisa Henry & J.A. Rock

HOW TO BUILD A CHICKEN COOP IN  
FOUR EASY STEPS

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

How to Build a Chicken Coop in Four Easy Steps is a free short story set in the Playing the Fool universe.

Please don't share outside the group!

- Lisa

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## STEP 1: SET YOUR GOAL

“Henry?” Mac asked as he stepped into the backyard. “Do you know what happened to my granola? I can’t—” He stopped and blinked. Several times. Henry was crouched in the grass, surrounded by...

Chickens.

Five hens; four brown, one white.

Henry looked up, smiling his gorgeous, easy smile. “Hey, Mac. I got the chickens.”

“What chickens?” Mac asked icily.

“The chickens! Chickens so we can have eggs. Meet Regan, Goneril, Beatrice, Paulina, and Tamora.”

Henry was holding Mac’s granola. The eight-dollars-a-box, sugar free, heart healthy granola Mac ate as part of his new diet. And he was feeding it to the chickens.

*To the chickens.*

“Tamora’s kinda evil.” Henry indicated the white hen, who was picking the goji berries out of Mac’s granola. “She keeps pecking Goneril. I tried giving them Skittles, but only Beatrice liked those, so I borrowed your granola, since I figured, chickens eat grain, you know?”

Mac pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Anyway, I just need to keep them in the yard until the wood gets here.”

“Wood?” Mac repeated blankly.

Just then, a white pickup rattled up their driveway, the bed full of planks. The driver parked and jumped out. “I have a delivery here for a—uh—” The man checked his sheet. “Benvolio Lear?”

Mac frowned. “Who the hell—”

Henry dumped the last of the granola on the ground and stepped toward the driver. “That’s me.”

Mac watched as Henry and the driver unloaded the planks and dumped them in the yard. *His* yard. His yard, full of chickens eating his eight-dollar granola. The white hen drove the others away from the goji berries with violent pecks.

When the driver left, Mac rounded on Henry. “What the hell is going on?” He motioned to the planks. “What is this?”

“Wood, Mac. White pine, actually. Did you know that the white pine’s leaves only grow on the tree’s upper half, because—”

“I know what wood is, Henry. What’s it for?”

Henry looked at him as though the answer was more obvious than anything in the world. “You have to build a chicken coop, Mac.”

## STEP 2: ACQUIRE A PLAN

**M**ac was in a meeting. His team was in the process of investigating two suspiciously similar murders in the Indianapolis area. His cell buzzed in his pocket, and the other members of the team turned to him. Val, who, with the help of visual aids, was describing victim number one's chest lacerations, fixed him with a look as he pulled out his phone.

"Is there a problem, Agent McGuinness?"

"Um, possibly." Mac stood, gaze flicking from Val to the gruesome pictures on the board then to Val again. "I'll just be a minute."

He stepped out of the room. "Henry, what is it?" He tried not to sound impatient, on the off chance this was an actual emergency and not just Henry calling to ask what he was wearing.

"She's gone!" Henry wailed. "Mac, she's gone. She's missing, and I don't know what to do!"

Mac's heart thudded. Henry's sister, Viola, was in a long-term care facility, and had wandered off before.

"She could have been missing for hours, and I didn't even know!" Henry sounded close to tears.

"Henry, shhhh," Mac soothed. "She's done this before, and she always—"

"She was my favorite! She was always my favorite."

Mac was a little confused, but he let it go. He started toward the

stairs. "I'm on my way home right now. Just stay calm, and don't go looking for her on your own."

"I need to file a missing person's report."

"We're not to that point yet." Mac was halfway down to the parking lot. "What did Grove Hill say?"

"Mac, I can't live without her!"

"I know. It's going to be okay."

"I was teaching her to sit on my lap!"

Mac stopped. "Henry."

"Yeah?" Henry asked in a small voice.

"Who is missing?"

"Goneril."

"You called me out of a meeting. Out of a *murder* investigation. Because you want to file a missing person's report on a chicken?"

"There's this little spot of red stuff on the floor, and I think maybe Tamora...maybe Tamora killed her. And ate her body. It would be very *Titus Andronicus*, you have to admit."

Mac tried very, very hard to remain patient. "The *floor*?"

"Floor of the coop, I mean," Henry said unconvincingly.

"Have you been bringing the chickens into the house?"

"They don't like when it storms!"

Mac barely kept his voice even. "You don't like when it storms. The chickens are outdoor animals, and they stay outdoors. In the coop. That I built with my own two hands."

"In the Middle Ages they used to—"

"Stop right there." Mac strode back up the stairs. "I'm going to finish my meeting. That chicken knows you're the guy with the food. She'll be back."

"Not if Tamora *ate* her!"

"What do you want me to do, Henry? Interrogate a chicken?"

There was a pause. Then Henry said, very quietly, "Yes."



## STEP 3: GATHER TOOLS AND MATERIALS

“**W**hat’s this?” Mac asked as Henry slid a plate in front of him. There was a veritable mountain of folded egg, bursting with peppers, ham cubes, cheese, onions, and hot sauce.

“An apology omelet.” Henry’s smile seemed forced. “The hens and I made it. I’m sorry for interrupting you at work, and I’m sorry I made you interrogate Tamora.”

Outside in the coop, Tamora was pecking Beatrice.

“She didn’t crack,” Henry mused. “Even when you withheld the goji berries.”

Mac caught Henry’s wrist before Henry could walk away. “Hey,” he said. “I know you’re worried about Goneril.”

Henry shrugged. “She’s just a chicken.”

Mac wasn’t fooled. He ran his thumb across Henry’s palm. “She’ll turn up.”

Henry wouldn’t look at him. Mac tugged him closer until he got Henry in his lap. Henry turned and gazed at Mac. “What if she doesn’t?”

These rare moments never failed to undo Mac. Moments where Henry went from carefree, all-the-world’s-a-stage to being completely lost, confused, silently begging Mac for help.

Exasperated, sympathetic, and utterly in love, Mac crushed Henry against him. Pushed him back slightly for a kiss. “She will.” Mac picked

up his fork and speared a bite of omelet. "Now help me eat this. I'm on a diet, you know."

## STEP 4: BUILD YOUR CHICKEN COOP

Mac rolled his eyes at the TV for the thousandth time. Henry, curled up beside him, swatted his arm. "I can hear you sighing."

"This could never happen in real life," Mac muttered.

"Mac, it's a *horror* movie. The whole point is that it's not real." Henry's shoulder dug into Mac's ribs. "This is a good part. Omigod I'm so scared."

"How can you be scared if you've seen it before?"

Henry shot him a glare. "You have absolutely no imagination."

"This makes no sense. What is *it*?"

"All you need to know, Mac, is that *It Follows*."

Mac stifled another sigh. Tightened his arm around Henry. Henry burrowed against him, hiding his eyes. "You've *seen it before*," Mac repeated in a whisper, jostling him.

Henry still yelped at the scary part and clutched Mac harder. Mac stroked Henry's back enjoying the sense of being needed. Normally Henry was always in motion, so Mac had to steal these brief periods of stillness and closeness where he could.

After a few minutes, Mac disentangled himself and rose. "If I have to watch this, I'm making popcorn."

Henry didn't look away from the screen. "With butter?"

"I'm on a diet. So it will be butterless and saltless. And I'll probably

burn it.”

He hid a grin as Henry scrambled off the couch and headed for the kitchen to make the popcorn. Henry wasn't the only master manipulator in this relationship. Mac was learning a trick or two. He settled back onto the couch and watched the screen.

Horror movies were ridiculous. Completely unrealistic. And that creeping sense of unease slowly settling over Mac as he watched? Probably because he was worried he'd forgotten to pay the cable bill or something. There was certainly nothing scary going on. Mac definitely didn't get the feeling that he wasn't alone in the room, or that someone was staring at him.

Not at all.

On screen, the music had stopped. The main character crept through a dark room.

When the demon burst forth, in a rush of movement and a flurry of feathers, Mac...

Screamed.

There was no other word for it.

Henry raced in. “Goneril!” He scooped the chicken up. “Sweetheart! Did the big scary man frighten you?”

Mac clutched his heart and narrowed his eyes at Henry. “Um, hello?”

“Oh, poor baby,” Henry crooned at the chicken, ignoring Mac. “Let's get you some popcorn.”

“Hello?” Mac asked again, but Henry had already vanished with the chicken.

Mac switched over to ESPN. He'd earned it.