Chickens

by Jake Barnes

“Easter's coming,” my wife says. “Should I dress as a bunny or a chicken?” she asks. She means for the costume party. I tell her I thought we were going as Adam and Eve. She wrinkles her nose.

I tell her about the Easter Beer Hunt we had when I was a stripling. Most of us had just graduated from college. We were renting a place on Lake Minnetonka, just a hop, skip, and a jump from the Twin Cities.

I say I can't remember whose idea it was, but my friend Mary and I volunteered to hide the beer. Our “eggs” were those little cans of malt liquor. You had to drink anything you found. Those were the rules.

We compromise about the costumes. She dresses as the Easter Bunny, I go as Donald Duck.

While we are still discussing our options, I tell her about the time I won an Easter egg decorating contest. I was in first grade. My prize was a live baby chick. WW II had just started, and I painted three eggs in the likeness of Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo. I called my entry “The Three Rotten Eggs.”

I got to keep the chicken, too. Kept him all that summer. I got a few more chickens to keep him company. In the fall, my father dispatched them all. Cut off their heads one day in the driveway behind our house. I cried and cried, but I knew the rule: No Animals in the House.

I forgave my father because I know he hated doing what had to be done. I never forgave my mother.

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