

# Chicken Run

by Serena

It all started with a phone call. I was sitting at home doing... well, frankly, I have no idea what I was doing.

Anyway, the phone rang and when I picked it up, a woman's voice said, "Hello, is Serena Starr there?"

I answered in my most polite voice, "Yes, I am Serena. Can I help you?"  
"I was wondering if you would be interested in pet sitting from the 13th of June to the 23rd."

"I would love to," I replied and two weeks later, there I was standing in front of the blue front door, key in hand.

I unlocked the door and went inside. I pored over the directions. First on my list were the cats. I walked over to the garage. Oh! I forgot to mention that the week before I had gone on a tour of their house. So I walked over to the cat bowls and scooped a little bit more than three cups of kitty kibble into their bowls. I then grabbed the larger water container and carried it to the bathroom, and without thinking I dumped it into the sink. I glanced down and saw a few pieces of kibble stuck to the little silver piece around the drain. Disgusting!

"Ewww!" I moaned.

I turned on the water to drain the kibble down the sink, but it didn't work.

Determined now, I grabbed some toilet paper and wiped away the waterlogged kibble. I

**Comment [1]:**  
Excellent first sentence. I want to know: what started? What will happen in this story?

**Comment [2]:**  
This introduces your narrator's voice. We know this story is being told by a spunky, honest young person.

**Comment [3]:**  
In this transition, you can slow down a bit and let those two weeks pass for your reader. One way to do that is to use a period instead of an "and" and to start "Two weeks later" as a new paragraph. This physical space on the page helps the reader feel the passing of time.

**Comment [4]:**  
Here, again is a good place for a paragraph break. By spacing out the thoughts, your reader will follow you more easily.

**Comment [5]:**  
Very strong physical detail. Details like this make your reader feel disgusted right along with your character. Excellent!

threw away the paper and looked again. There were still kibble remnants in the sink. I turned the water back on and at last the kibble drained away. I took the water container and refilled it, then took it back to the garage.

Cats, check.

I walked downstairs to the fish tank. I took out the food. A putrid smell was emanating from the jar of food. As is my habit, I whispered, “Ca c’est degolose!” which translates to, “That is disgusting.”

Careful to breathe from my mouth and not my nose, I took a pinch of the revolting fish flakes and dropped them into the bowl. I then quickly replaced the jar and released the breath I realized I had been holding.

“Disgusting,” I murmured one more time as I silently vowed never to get fish.

I walked outside and down the steps. Now was my big challenge, feeding the chickens. I took deep calming breaths as I took out the first scoop of feed. I walked up to the gate. The chickens followed. They crowded so close that I was scared to go in.

“Okay, to the other side.”

I walked to the wooden hen house and opened the door. The chickens followed.

“Okay, maybe I can get them to follow me here and then I can run back and pour in the food.”

Silently, I counted to myself, “One, two, three.”

I quickly walked to the opposite gate and into the pen. Inevitably, the chickens followed.

“Okay, chickens. Go get your food,” and with that, I dumped it into the bucket.

Victory was mine. Serena 1, chickens nil.

**Comment [6]:**

By making this problem difficult to solve, you give it more physical reality.

**Comment [7]:**

Consider rewording to: “Then I quickly...” This word order is more natural to read.

**Comment [8]:**

I love how you build up to this moment with the other pets. The build up gives this moment more importance.

**Comment [9]:**

It is funny how you say all of this out loud, to yourself. Speaking to oneself is absolutely true of this kind of situation. People talk themselves through challenges.

**Comment [10]:**

Consider putting a period after “food” and starting your new sentence with “With that...” This allows there to be more definition between the dialogue and the action in this line.

I went back to the feed, grabbed a second cup, and then dumped it into the bucket. I grabbed the water container. I stepped out of the pen and tapped the door shut with my foot, then walked to the other side. I set down the bucket and walked inside the hen house, pulling from my pocket a small paper bag to collect eggs with. My luck was good, for there were four eggs. As I reached for them a chicken came into the coop.

“Shoo!” I said. “Go away, chicken.”

I grabbed two eggs and put them into the bag. The chicken came closer.

“No, bad chicken!” I started reaching for the third egg. The chicken advanced. I stomped, which semi-frightened the chicken and in the pause after my stomp, I grabbed the last two eggs and quietly stepped out of the hen house and into safety.

Serena two, chickens nil.

I set down the eggs and emptied the two water containers. I walked up the stairs to the hose. I filled the water containers and picked up the big one. There was no way I could carry both down the stairs at once.

“Aha!” With my mastermind skills, I had devised a plan.

I carried the bottle down a few steps, then raced back up for the next. I continued my plan of action until I was down the steps. I had no trouble putting the small container back. It was the large one that was my major problem. I stepped in to the barbed wire corral and careful to open and close the gate behind me, flipped the container over onto the rest. In the process, I spilled water all over my shoes. So angry and disgruntled, I headed toward the gate. It was open and a chicken was out.

“Oh no!”

**Comment [11]:**

Look over your verbs in this paragraph. You “grab” twice and “walk” twice. Could you substitute those repeat verbs for something more active?

**Comment [12]:**

Ha! This is such funny dialogue.

**Comment [13]:**

Excellent word choice. The contrast with what we expect from a chicken adds a lot of humor.

I ran out, shut the gate, and in a strange squatting position, my hands outstretched, I jumped. So did the chicken. I lunged again this time grabbing him.

“Ah Ha!” I said in triumph. Chicken under one arm, I opened the gate, then shut it just as quickly. The other two chickens were attempting to join their friend on the other side of the fence. I scurried to the other door and opened it. One of the chicken’s wings got free. I banged the door a few times to frighten the other chickens and dropped the chicken unceremoniously on the floor. I closed the door.

Serena three, chickens... well, how much would you count a chicken run as?

Dear Serena,

Chicken Run is a delightful, funny story. Thank you so much for sharing it with me.

We offer a written critique of Inkleling stories as part of membership for two reasons. We hope our comments will help you with this specific story, but we also hope we can help you more generally in your journey to build writing skills.

Here is what I noticed about Chicken Run.

### **Humor:**

You have a knack for creating humor through dialogue, action and narration. You'll notice I made some comments about specific lines that made me laugh, for instance, "The chicken advanced." "Advanced is a very strong verb, a verb that makes me think of battle tanks and charging buffalo, which, contrasted with the image of a chicken, made hilarious pictures in my mind.

Your verbs also made certain passages race by, in the frantic way that physical comedy sometimes does, one action causing another, causing another, creating a snowball-into-an-avalanche effect.

Since you are so strong at using humor, I've included a one-page tip-sheet on ways to emphasize humor in your writing. You might find that some of the tips help you sharpen the funny things you have already done with this story. The tips may also help you dream up a new comic idea. I'd strongly urge you to continue writing funny, physical scenes like this one. Not everyone has the ability to make a scene come to life in such a funny way. I am very impressed.

### **Timing:**

I made a few notes in your manuscript where I asked you to consider using a period and a new sentence or new paragraph instead of an "and." As writers, we make a movie in our readers' minds with the words on the page. White space on the page is part of the movie too.

Notice how by ending my paragraph, and leaving two empty lines, you stopped and took a breath, had a moment to think and catch up with me?

Words are powerful. Sentences and paragraphs are too. When you create a very long sentence, full of commas, dashes, and other punctuation, your reader might tumble through the sentence at great speed. Short sentences feel like quick breaths. The shorter, the quicker. (Notice how that wasn't even a sentence at all, instead it was a fragment.) I have included a one-page tip-sheet on how to use punctuation, sentences, paragraphs and

white space to control the speed with which your reader will read your story. I hope this will be a fun new skill for you to experiment with in your writing.

Serena, I am very impressed with your writing skills and this particular story, *Chicken Run*. I hope that you keep writing, keep learning, keep challenging yourself to find the very best way to tell the unique stories that only you can tell. Consider doing a final edit on this story and submitting it to one of the publication opportunities that you can find in our online clubhouse in your exclusive member area.

Thank you for sharing your creativity and writing with the Inklings!

Happy Writing,  
Naomi