

Friends of a Feather

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Chapter One

No Friends

It all started last year in school. My third-grade math was taking forever. *Hurry, hurry*, I remember telling myself. *I CANNOT have homework today! Not on this special day!* I was so excited that the tip of my pencil kept breaking off.

Then Miss Laura came to my desk and said, “Julia, are you excited about something?” Miss Laura is the best teacher ever. I love to make her smile, and she smiled then.

“Yes, ma’am!” I said. “I’m excited about my chicks! I put four chicken eggs in a blue shoe box under a light-bulb to keep warm, and they’re supposed to hatch today. Dad says it takes exactly twenty-one days. I take care of them every day and turn them and mist them with water from a spray bottle Mom gave me—and they’re going to hatch today. I just know!”

I could tell Miss Laura was a little surprised. Usually I don't say much at school, but I was so happy.

"Wonderful!" she said, patting my shoulder.

"Is it okay if I stay inside during recess and finish my math?" I whispered. "I don't want homework. Not today!"

Some lines wrinkled Miss Laura's forehead. She thought a minute and then whispered in my ear, "Tell you what—come. I want us to talk by ourselves."

So we stepped out into the hall. Miss Laura said, "Julia, don't you think you should play? Ever since you started school this year, I've noticed something. It seems that you don't like to play with the other children very much. Can you tell me why?"

I stared at the shiny hall floor. Why did Miss Laura have to bring up something like this today? How could I answer that anyway? How could my perfect teacher understand? How could I tell her, *Nobody really likes me, and I always do something embarrassing on the playground? And the others make fun of me—a lot. I just like to play by myself when I get home.*

I didn't know what to say, so I just bunched up my shoulders in a shrug.

Miss Laura gave me a little frown and said, "Okay, Julia. Let's get back to our lessons. It's fine for you to



do your math during recess so that you can be with your new chicks after school. But tomorrow I want you outside at recess. We all need fresh air, sunshine, and friends, you know.”

I thought about Miss Laura’s question for the rest of the day. Why *couldn’t* I play with the other children and have fun?

But when school was over, I hopped on my bike and forgot about all that. *I’m a mother bird now*, I pretended. Even though the mother of my chicks was a chicken, and chickens don’t really fly, it was still fun. I sped faster and faster. I was flying—flying to my nest of happy little chicks!

