

Annie Learns To Do Good



by Alicia Sindt

Annie shut the closet door and unwrapped the cherry sucker in the dark. It was sweet and sticky and just tart enough to be delicious. Annie thought about how unfair her brother Jeffery was. Grandma Webb had sent a dozen of the special suckers to Jeff for his birthday. That birthday had been a week ago, and Jeff hadn't shared one of them yet. Inside, Annie was hot and still and mad about it. She had asked Mom and Dad to make Jeff share with her, but they didn't. They said it was Jeff's present, and it was up to him whether or not to share.

Annie's eyes filled with tears as she thought of how Jeffery had told her no. She told him that Jesus said that you were supposed to share with your sister. Jeffery had told her that Jesus had said she wasn't supposed to covet things that did not belong to her. And then Jeff had said that sharing didn't include sharing suckers.

After that, she didn't exactly remember what was said or what she did. She did remember that she had called him a sinner and that he wasn't going to live with Jesus in heaven. About that time, Mom had shown up and each of them had been punished. And still, Mom hadn't made Jeff share with her.

Annie licked the sucker again. She had snuck it out of Jeff's room while he was doing chores and hid it in her suitcase. Now that she was at Grandma and Grandpa Netter's house, she was finally able to enjoy the sucker. She wondered if it was right to take Jeff's sucker. She quickly stuffed that thought away. If Jeff had done what was right and shared, she wouldn't

have had to take the sucker anyway. It didn't even taste very good anymore. It seemed as if the taste was off somehow. And it was stinging her tongue a little now.

Annie heard the muffled sound of Grandma Netter calling to her. She wrapped the sucker back in its waxed paper and crept from the closet to put it back inside her suitcase. She went down the stairs and into Grandma's kitchen.

"Did you need me, Grandma?" Annie asked.

"Yes, I wanted you to take these potato peelings out to feed the chickens. Your grandpa is still outside doing chores and supper will be ready soon." Grandma gave her the bucket half-full of potato skins. Grandma looked closely at Annie's face. "Honey, are you feeling well?" Grandma felt her forehead. "Your face is red and hot. Do you have a fever?"

Annie shook her head. "No, I feel fine. I'll take these out to Grandpa."

Annie ducked out the door and headed for the chicken house. She could hear Grandpa singing "The Old, Old Path." She thought it was odd that her tongue felt even itchier now. Her arms were starting to feel itchy also.

Grandpa was busy putting a staple in the chicken wire.

"What are you doing, Grandpa?" Annie asked.

The old man looked up from the repair to smile at his granddaughter. "I'm fixing this hole. What have you got there?"

"Grandma sent these peelings out to the chickens."

Annie peered at his work.

"How did that hole get there?" Annie bent a piece of the wire toward the pole.

"Chickens like to scratch and lean on the wire.

After a while, the staple gives way, and the next thing you have is a hole." Grandpa picked up the hammer and another of the large staples.



"This hole doesn't look too big to me, Grandpa. It's still smaller than a chicken can get through. Couldn't you wait to fix it until it's bigger?" Annie watched as he drove another staple into the pole, and she scratched at her arm.

"Not really. See, the chickens will make the hole bigger, and they will get out of the pen. That's just how chickens are. If I wait until the chickens are running around the yard, the dogs will probably eat at least one or two of them. It's better to make the chicken wire secure and keep both the dogs and the chickens out of trouble." Grandpa pounded the last staple in place.

Annie looked at Bo Dog. He looked sleepy, like he would never chase or kill a chicken. Just then, Bo's eyes focused hard on the chickens. Annie gasped just a little. He would kill a chicken if he could. She could see that in his eyes. He even looked like he would think it was fun.

"Why don't you get rid of the dogs so the chickens will be safe?" Annie asked.

"The chickens are safe as long as they follow the rules and stay in their pen. I keep the pen secure to help them follow those rules. Bo doesn't ever dig around their pen. He only gets them if the chickens get out. Besides, if Bo wasn't here then foxes or coyotes would get the chickens instead. The chickens are safe only when they stay inside the fence." Grandpa put the hammer back in the bucket with the staples and sat back on his heels.

"You see Annie, we are much like the chickens. We are surrounded by God's love and protection. Only for us, the commandments in the scriptures are like the fence. We get stubborn like the chickens, and we push at the boundaries the Lord has set around us with the commandments. Sometimes we even leave the boundary of His commandments like the chickens push out of the pen. Instead of Bo Dog waiting to eat us, Satan is waiting to destroy our souls."

Annie scratched at the itchy spots on her arms and wiggled as something was itching her back now, too. "What happens if one of the other chickens is bad and it makes the other chickens leave the pen?"

Grandpa stared at Annie's arms for a second. Then he answered. "It doesn't work like that, Annie. One chicken may push at the pen and even make the hole. But every chicken makes its own choice to leave the safety of the pen. Just like one person may say bad things about the Lord's commandments and try to convince people that the commandment is wrong or doesn't apply anymore. But every person decides whether to sin by themselves."

Grandpa took Annie's hand and turned it to get a better look at her arm. "But Grandpa, there is a big world out here for the chickens to explore. If it weren't for the dog they would be happier out here than in the coop."

Grandpa looked her in the eye. "It is a big world

outside of the Lord's commandments. But there is a devil, and he will more surely catch you when you sin than Bo will catch a chicken who leaves the coop. Alma told his son, Corianton 'Wickedness never was happiness.' (Alma 19:73 RLDS) [Alma 41:10 LDS].

You see, Corianton had gone on a missionary trip with his father. Corianton left the safety of the Lord's commandments and sinned. Because Corianton sinned, many people would not believe Alma when he preached about the Lord. So Corianton was like a chicken that had pushed a hole in the fence and clucked for the other chickens to leave the safety and follow him. Many people did, and they lost their souls for it. Because Corianton returned to his father, we have the words of Alma to him. Alma had to explain to his son how the son's sins had caused harm to the people and harm to himself. "It is never happiness to discover that you have done wrong and that not only you but others will suffer because of your wrong."

Annie, you are covered in spots. What have you gotten into?

Annie looked at the red bumps on her arms. "I don't know, Grandpa. They itch though."

"Annie, you have red all around your mouth too. What have you been eating?"

Annie thought about lying about the sucker, but she looked into Grandpa's eyes and saw how much he loved her. In that moment, she knew she had been wrong to take Jeff's sucker. In that moment, she knew she had been wrong to say those mean things to

him. In that moment she knew that she was the real sinner. Jeff may have pushed a hole in the fence by not sharing, but she had stolen the sucker out of her own free will. In that moment, she knew what Grandpa had said was true, "Wickedness was not happiness."

A tear slid out of her eye. "Grandpa, I have done something wrong. I stole one of Jeff's suckers, and I should not have done it."

Annie's evening was not what she had planned. There was the phone call to her parents and medicine for the hives that soon covered her body. There were apologies to her parents and her brother for doing wrong. Her mother read the ingredient list on the sucker and discovered that the formula had changed. The sucker now had a dye that Annie was allergic to. If she hadn't taken the sucker, none of this would have happened. Her trip to her grandparents was much shorter than she had expected.

As she closed her eyes to sleep in her own bed, she pondered the words of Alma that her Grandpa had shared. "Wickedness never was happiness." They were so true. She had pushed out the safety of God's commandments and had hives to show for it. Now back in the safety of His words again, and she vowed she would always do what was right in the future.

