

Lynne and I had planned our Spring 2003 trip to Vancouver Island in British Columbia some months in advance. Lynne had purchased a new puppy from Tony and Helena James and, as neither of us needs much of an excuse to make a journey, I volunteered to travel with her. We would take along the adult racers and make a racing trip out of it!

We arrived at the James' home on Thursday afternoon and spent the remainder of the week settling in, getting acquainted with Cooper, Lynne's new pup, and preparing for the weekend races. Saturday morning dawned sunny and without a hint of the darkness about to occur.

Lynne and Helena set out to get the morning chores out of the way before the racers began arriving. Lynne was in a particularly good mood, giving her hellos to the ponies on her way to the goat barn.

"Good morning, Breckon! Good morning, chickens!" she called as she walked past the chicken yard. She emulated Helena's routine from the previous morning and let the chickens out to peck at the track.

"Good morning, Billy!"

Lynne set to her work quickly and was hard at her mucking when Helena arrived at the goat barn, wondering who'd let the chickens out. Lynne explained that she'd followed the routine from the day before, to which Helena countered "But we don't let the chickens out on race days!"

Oops!

They spent some time chasing down the chickens and got them all rounded up and safely ensconced in their pen. Helena explained that they liked to call these fowl the Idiot

Chickens, as when she and Tony had bought them, they'd got the last of the batch for sale and had had a hard time collecting them. They tended to fly more than regular chickens and resisted being caught. It was obvious to her that they'd been left with the Idiots as all the good chickens had already been sold.

With everything seemingly back to normal, I came by with Dayton and Parker to give them a nice morning walk through the woods. We weren't more than a couple of yards from the goat barn when one of the Idiot Chickens fluttered down off the fence. Dayton and Parker wasted no time in snatching it up. A great ruckus ensued with the chicken flapping, the whippets in a frenzy, and me screaming at them to "Let that chicken go!"

Both brothers rolled their eyes in my direction and, fearing deprivation of their incredible windfall, high-tailed it down the track in the opposite direction. I pursued them and the trail of chicken feathers, yelling all the while and feeling very much like Mrs. Tweedy. In no time at all, they'd disappeared into the woods at the back of the property.

Although it was apparent by then that the Idiot Chicken had gone to the great pecking ground in the sky, I figured I'd now be able to corner them in the woods and get the dearly departed's body away from them before it suffered any further indignities. Dayton and Parker simultaneously came to the same realisation and, like most common thieves facing capture, decided to split up.

So it was that Dayton and his portion of the booty went in one direction, Parker and his portion of the booty went in another, and a third portion lay at my feet, awaiting collection. I pocketed the egg, left the nasty bits for later, and picked up the boys'

leftovers. Although it wasn't too meaty, it was impressive-looking enough to entice the two rogues out of the woods.

I lured them back to the gate and handed over the remains (what there was of them) to Helena. I was dreadfully upset. What an affront to the James' hospitality those heathens had perpetrated! Helena assured us that the chickens truly were Idiots and not to worry--it wasn't the first Idiot Chicken to be sent to an early grave by one of these boys' littermates!

Looking just sorry enough to escape a more severe scolding, Parker went off with Lynne and Dayton returned with me to the scene of their gluttony while I cleaned up what remained with a pitchfork. Having taken care of that, I returned the pitchfork to the barn.

As I was leaving the goat pen, I caught a glimpse of a skulking black creature out of the corner of my eye. I whirled on it, only to discover that Dayton had yet another Idiot Chicken in his mouth!

"Drop it!" I yelled.

Having a (dare I say it?) biddable dog, he immediately dropped the chicken, upon which the chicken attempted to fly away. The fluttering of its wings excited that primal instinct in Dayton and he snatched it up again.

"Drop it!" I yelled again.

He dropped. It fluttered. He snatched. I yelled. He dropped. It fluttered. He snatched. And so on and so on.

As Dayton dropped and snatched, Tony and I managed to corner him in another pen where he ultimately surrendered up his ill-gotten Idiot. Tony collected the poor

creature and returned it to the chicken pen. As he set it carefully on the ground, a small gurgle escaped from its lips (do chickens even have lips?). It then gave its feathers a great ruffle, composed itself, and strutted off to tell its mates about how it had conquered the Black Beast.

As for the Black Beast, he was given a spanking and sent to bed without any breakfast. Well, any *more* breakfast.

What a day! And it wasn't even ten a.m. yet!

Lynne and I spent the remainder of our visit with the James' looking for a suitable replacement for the Idiot Chicken. First, we thought that we would buy another laying hen. The practicality of finding and buying a hen in a strange community put an end to that idea. Later, we considered finding some sort of chicken-themed decorative item for the house. We weren't sure what exactly would fit with their décor and, although Lynne found a chicken print in an antique store, she ultimately decided that it wouldn't do and so she kept it for herself. Finally, we lit upon the idea of having t-shirts made to commemorate the Idiot Chicken affair.

Some weeks after we'd returned home, Helena wrote to Lynne and me, letting us know that the future of the Idiot Chicken lines had not died out with that unfortunate hen:

*Just in case you feel that our idiot chickens are due to die out, you may be pleased to hear that one of the idiot hens came out of the woods today with at least 12 fluffy cheepers. Within minutes, a black predator in the shape of a raven was preying on them. However, my friend, Rona, and I managed to herd the idiot family into one of the stalls safely out of reach*

*of the raven's gaping beak, thus ensuring that there would be more dainty morsels for Parker and Dayton on their next visit to their birthland.*