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Juvenile Fiction

The Old Woman and the Hen
P.K. Page
Tim Inkster
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Much-loved Canadian poet P. K. (Patricia Kathleen) Page (1916 -) brings the wisdom and depth that comes of her many years to this delightful tale. Enhanced by exquisite original wood engravings created especially for the book by Jim Westergard, *The Old Woman and the Hen* is sure to bring enjoyment to children and adults alike.

Page's tale is the story of an old woman who lives alone and earns her food by doing small chores for her neighbors. One day, on her way home, she hears a hen calling out to her from the side of the road. Her heart is moved to compassion, and she picks up the bedraggled creature, puts it in her basket, and takes it home with her. She feeds and cares for the hen, even though it appears that it will never lay an egg. One day, she hears more "luck-lucking" than usual from the hen, and when she goes outside to find out what the trouble is, she discovers that it has laid a crystal egg.

As the old woman wonders at its beauty, a terrible scene appears within it—a flood is about to destroy the village and her own home will be carried away! Her attempts to warn the villagers brings laughter, and more—the old woman intuits that a young man in the crowd covets her hen. The egg confirms her suspicions with a vision of danger and she is forced to make a decision: should she hand over the hen, who has become her only real friend, to save her own life, or give up the egg that has provided a way for her to escape disaster?

Readers may be left wondering when they notice that the hen's "luck-luck" at the beginning of the tale has become the "cluck-cluck" of an everyday barnyard hen at its end: Is it a misprint? Or is it a message that magic can appear, specific to the needs of a situation, and then disappear when danger has passed?

Page's tale conveys respect for attitudes and traits of character like friendliness, compassion, clear thinking, openness, and generosity. While not denying the very real dangers that exist in the world, the author lets readers know that help can often come from unexpected

sources, and that there is wisdom in being attentive to one's intuition. She also gracefully reveals how the power of a shared dream can sometimes shape the future in wondrous ways.

P. K. Page has written ten volumes of poetry, a novel, short stories, three children's books, a memoir, and a chapbook for young readers.

Kristine Morris