

Chicken Licken Rides The Bus

by Karilynn Benjamin

Art by Suzanne Beaky



IT WAS THE first day of school, and I was ready. I had a brand-new backpack full of crayons with sharp tips, fresh markers, and glue sticks with no boogers on them.

There was just one problem—I was a teensy, tiny bit afraid to ride the bus. My mom had always driven me to school before. I wasn't sure if kids on the bus would be nice to me.

That's why, when Mom wasn't looking, I snuck my chicken into the house. Her name is Chicken Licken. She's not supposed to come inside, because when she's excited . . . well, she has "accidents." Mom is not fond of wiping up chicken messes, so I have to sneak her in.

I dumped out my school supplies to make room for Chicken Licken in my backpack. She fit perfectly. I left the zipper a little open so she could breathe OK.

"Emma!" Mom called. "Time to catch the bus."

We headed outside and waited at the end of the driveway. Pretty soon we could see a cloud of dust on the horizon. Then we heard the crunch of gravel as the big yellow bus approached.



Hi! Spider here. I'd take my favorite hippopotamus on the bus with me.





“Now remember, honey, listen to your teacher,” Mom said. “Be nice to the other kids. Remember to share—”

“I know, Mom.”

She wiped away a tear and gave me a big hug. I swallowed hard and climbed up the bus steps.

“Hello!” said the bus driver. The tag on his shirt said Mr. Wheeler. “First day of school, eh? Big day!”

I nodded and trudged back a few seats behind him. After I sat down, I waved to Mom. She waved back really big. As the bus started moving, I hugged my backpack close.

After a while the bus slowed down. A little girl younger than me was waiting, clutching her dad’s hand and crying.

“Hello!” Mr. Wheeler said as the bus door opened. “First day of school, eh? Big day!” The girl cried harder and hung on to her dad. He carried her onto the bus and sat her down next to me.

“You’ll be OK, Suzie,” her dad murmured. He blew her a kiss and then he was gone. I took a peek at Suzie. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Hi,” I whispered. “I’m Emma. Want to see what’s in my backpack?” I started to unzip it. Suzie looked at me, her eyes wide.

“Is it a snake?” she asked.

“No!” I laughed. “It’s Chicken Licken.” I unzipped my backpack a little more, and Chicken Licken peeked out.

“*Bac, bac,*” she clucked. She turned her head sideways and winked at Suzie. Suzie giggled.

“I brought her today so I wouldn’t feel afraid,” I said. “She’s my best friend. Do you have a best friend?”

“No,” Suzie answered.

“Well, maybe you can be my other best friend. Then we can always sit together on the bus.”

“OK. Can I pet her?” Suzie asked.

“Sure,” I said. Just then the bus stopped again. A little boy shuffled on, fists tight at his sides. He sat across from us.

“Hi, I’m Emma,” I said.

“*Bac, bac,*” said Chicken Licken.

The boy narrowed his eyes. “Did your backpack talk?” he asked me.

I opened the zipper, and Chicken Licken poked her head out.

“Cool!” cried the boy. “Can I hold her?”

“OK,” I agreed, a tad reluctantly. I started to pass my backpack across the aisle as the bus stopped again. This time a boy was waiting with his mom and a big German shepherd.

“Woof! Woof! Woof!” barked the dog.

Chicken Licken squawked and fluttered out of my arms, running straight for the back of the bus. I swooped after her.

“Chicken Licken,” I crooned, getting down on my knees. “Come here, Chickie.”

“What’s going on back here?” roared Mr. Wheeler as he marched up the aisle.



Reluctantly means with doubt or hesitation.



“Uh, I lost my gum,” I squeaked, pretending to check under the seat. “No gum here!” Just then Chicken Licken poked her head out.

“*Bac, bac—BAC!*” When I heard that sound, I knew what Chicken Licken was about to do.

Crack! A fresh egg, with golden yolk shimmering, slid right past me, straight toward Mr. Wheeler’s shoes.

Uh-oh. I gulped and looked up at Mr. Wheeler’s red face. “Um, at least she didn’t have an accident?”

I had to sit behind Mr. Wheeler the rest of the way to school. Chicken Licken was snuggled safely in my backpack.

When we got to school, Mom was waiting for me in the office.

“Emma!” she exclaimed. “Chicken Licken is not allowed on the bus!”

“Mom,” I said, looking right into her eyes. “I was a teensy, tiny bit afraid to ride the bus. That’s why I brought her. But now I have two new friends to sit with.”

Mom sighed. “No more chickens on the bus, Emma. Deal?”



“Deal,” I said.

The next morning Mom and I waited at the end of our road. The big yellow bus roared up in a cloud of dust.

“Bye, Mom!” I hollered as the bus door opened.

“Hello!” Mr. Wheeler said. “Second day of school, eh? Big day!” He poked my backpack as I walked by. “No chickens in there, right?”

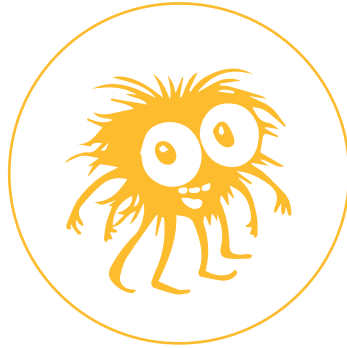
“Meowww!” said my backpack. 🐱

I'd like to see Mr. Wheeler
take issue with a fluffy
kitten. That's impossible!





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