

TT 13 Day 30 (Chicken Edith)

Edith hadn't been well for years. She was constantly bullied by the others, sat in a corner of the run, lost her feathers and was often pecked and picked on. Edith is a chicken, or more precisely a Pekin Bantam hen, bedecked in a bell-shaped curtain of lavender feathers. The general blurb (or Wikibirdia) says, 'the Pekin chicken is a true bantam with no large fowl counterpart, renowned for its fluffy and round shape. It is kept almost purely for ornamental or exhibition purposes. The Pekin is a remarkably popular pet chicken, mostly because they are docile and easy to keep.

The hens are regularly broody and are known to be good sitters and attentive mothers. They are not particularly productive egg layers laying between 120 and 160 per year. The Pekin comes originally from China and it is said that they were stolen in the 1800s from the Emperor in Peking's private collection. They come in different colours: lavender, blue, silver partridge, red partridge, blue mottled, Columbian, cuckoo, mottled, buff, black, white and wheaten.

They have short shanks and are small round, fluffy and tilted. Their feathers make them look much bigger than they actually are. They are rather round-shaped, and their carriage tilts forward, with the head slightly closer to the ground than their elaborate tail feathers. This 'tilt' is a key characteristic of the Pekin'.

So much for all that ornithology stuff and I now want to tell you about ours. The Guvnor was given six by his wife for his 'nth' birthday in 2007 and some, if not all, have been around all my life as I was born into this madhouse in 2012. I say not all because one by one they snuffed it just as the Wikibirdia blurb said they would.

Reasons included 'old age' (6 years old), egg bound (unlikely as they were not prolific layers), illness and bottom of the pecking order. Edith was in the last category together with Ethel and when they were both very elderly and looking particularly bedraggled, frazzled and generally tetchy and below par the Guvnor put a notice on their chicken house inviting the fox, who he had named 'Dignitas', to put them out of their misery.

He didn't mean it, of course, as he continued to feed them and carefully lock them up at night but, one day, Ethel turned up her claws and went off scratching in a different firmament. That left Edith and after six months on her own as every chicken's favourite maiden aunt, she took on a new lease of life. Her coxcomb brightened, her eyes lit up, her lavender feathers grew back making her an acceptable attendee at the Conservative Conference and a WI Convention, and she strutted about like a model on the catwalk. She swatted the sparrows away from her food, stayed up late and was alert and ready to go in the mornings.

And then, to cap it all, and at the age of 13 in human years and 176 in chicken years, she broke all records by laying two eggs in a week, something she hadn't managed for the last five years. It is a miracle and something to really celebrate in these tricky times. I just hope the Guvnor doesn't go and spoil it all by forgetting to lock her up one night. At least the sign has gone.

