

ROOSTER!



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Chapter 1

The November sun is shining, and there isn't a cloud in the blue sky. I look out the window and see endless fields of cut corn, scattered small wood lots, and light-tan fields of waist-high grass.

This part of South Dakota is very different than where I live in Minnesota. We have way more trees. But this land is beautiful in its own way.

We've been driving in Dad's Suburban for almost eight hours, yet I'm so excited

that I can barely contain myself. This is my first trip pheasant hunting to South Dakota.

My hunting buddy Mitch is next to me. His grandma and grandpa live on a farm out here, and our dads have been coming for years. Mitch has told me all about the farm.

I'm fired up because our three-day adventure starts today. I can't wait to see all the animals—and, of course, I can't wait to hunt! This will be the greatest trip ever.

Mitch and I are both twelve years old. We met because our dads are best friends. They do all kinds of hunting and fishing together. Mitch and I have been on a bunch of fun adventures with them. We love hunting and fishing so much that I think we could do it every day.

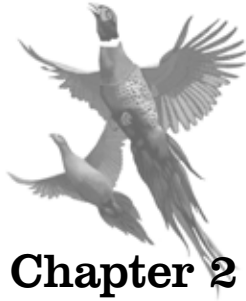
Mitch is a little shorter than me and has curly brown hair. He kinda looks like

his dad, Todd. I guess I look like my dad too—I have red hair just like him.

Todd is driving the truck in front of us, and Syd and Crystal are riding with him. Syd is Mitch's sister, and Crystal is mine. They're fourteen and love to hunt. They're not quite as obsessed as Mitch and me, but they do get fired up.

Crystal has red hair, just like Dad and me. Syd has long brown hair the same color as Mitch's. Syd is a great shot with her shotgun. She's one of the best shots on her high school trap team.

I can't wait to start our pheasant hunting adventure. Just when I think I'm about to burst with anticipation, I see the farm up ahead!



Chapter 2

We follow Todd up the dirt driveway, heading toward an old two-story mint-green farmhouse. But then, we slow down to barely a crawl.

I peek over the front seat to see the holdup. Turns out that Todd's truck is surrounded by a bunch of birds—ducks, geese, turkeys, and chickens. He's moving as slow as cold honey, waiting for them to move.

Trigger starts whining from the kennel in the back. He can't see what's going on ahead of us with all those birds, but he sure can sense it.

Trigger is the best dog in the world. He's a three-year-old English setter. He's mostly white, with browns, blacks, and grays mixed in all over him.

He's fun to follow when we're chasing pheasants. He's a pointer, which means when he smells a bird close by, he locks on point, sticks his long tail up, and doesn't move.

Well, that's what he's *supposed* to do. Sometimes he gets pretty excited and can't contain himself. In those cases, he doesn't point but rather sneaks in on the bird.

Either way, it's super cool to watch him hunt. He's our buddy.

I bet Zoey, Mitch's family's black lab, is going crazy too. She's in a kennel in the bed of Todd's pickup. Labradors are trained to flush out birds. Together, Zoey and Trigger make a great team of bird dogs for our hunting adventures.

Finally, we make it through the sea of birds and park in front of the farmhouse. Mitch and I jump out. Instantly, we're surrounded by ducks, geese, and chickens.

"Whoa! Back up, guys," I say to the eager birds.

"They aren't going to hurt you," I hear a lady say. "They're just hoping you have something to feed them."

"Hi, Grandma!" Mitch calls out.

"Hi, Mitch!" she says with happiness flowing through her words.

Mitch and Syd race up to their grandma and give her a big hug. Then their grandpa comes outside, and they run over to him.

Todd steps forward to make some introductions. “Luke, Crystal—this is my mom and dad, Bernadine and Willard. But you can call them Grandma and Grandpa to keep it simple.”

“That works for me!” I say with a satisfied smile and a quick head nod.

They already seem like the nicest people ever—just like Mitch has been telling me.

I look around the barnyard and can’t believe how many animals I see. Five huge turkeys are all by themselves next to a huge pine tree. Then there are giant white ducks, big white-and-brown geese, and too

many chickens to count. They're all flocked together, walking around like a giant crowd of people at a fair.

Then I see six black-and-white cows. Two have their noses over the fence, and the others are busy eating thick green grass.

“Let's get you inside and settled in so you can hit the field for a quick hunt before the sun goes down,” Grandpa says.

Mitch and I look at each other. In a flash, we fly back to the vehicles to unload.

Hunting, here we come!