

The Birthday Baloney

A Tales of Young Roscoe Story

By William S. Russell III

Hiding behind the green couch with luncheon meat was always a tricky business. One could not let up one's guard just because the grab had successfully been made. A million things could go wrong. But this was a big day, and the risk was worth it.

Lunch had gone pretty much as usual. The adult human female had set food out on the table. She had carefully arranged deli meats, bread, plates, glasses and silverware, and then after these efforts, she had spent nearly twenty minutes trying to wrangle the adult human male and the little female offspring to come and eat. This process always confused the fuzzy gray kitten, because the minute he heard the lid pop on a can of Mr. Yum's Deluxe Mystery Loaf Surprise Qat Food—Now with Special Flavor Gobs™! he came running. He especially liked the Brown flavor and the way it stuck to his whiskers. Not so with people. Thumbs had made them lazy, and they took meals for granted. The adult male was ensconced on the couch, his focus riveted to the television like that of a kitten about to pounce on an unsuspecting littermate. The little girl was under her bed. Earlier that morning the Banana Mania crayon had rolled under the bed frame, and after scrambling beneath the bed spread draped low to the floor in order to recover it, she had determined that the dark space made for an excellent fort. Passersby could hear her mutter things like “The Mole People don't like sunlight. The Mole People will rule the pale surface-dwellers.” The kitten had sniffed all around the bed after she first went under, and decided to let the whole Under-the-Bed-Mole-People-Invasion thing play itself out without his direct involvement.

Finally, everyone had gone to the lunch table, and for a few brief moments, the only sound to be heard was munching. The kitten sat at the threshold of the kitchen, his pink kitten nose twitching as he tried to make out which condiments were being used. His delicate sense of smell returned the odors of mustard and mayonnaise, and the piquant aroma of ketchup (or *catsup*—a name which the kitten found mildly offensive for some reason). Just the usual. If asked, he was a fan of tartar sauce, especially on those rare occasions when it was applied liberally to pastrami, but no one was being adventurous today. Without so much as a word, the Fisher family scarfed down their sandwiches, while the kitten waited patiently, unnoticed. After a few minutes the adult male excused himself, with: “important work to do.” The little girl pushed herself out from the table, and first one foot and then the other slid gingerly to the floor.

“I have to clean my room, Mommy,” she said.

“Oh, really? Well, you had better get to it then,” the adult female said, one eyebrow raised.

With that, the towheaded child scampered out of the kitchen, and the kitten knew it was time to make his move. Tens of thousands of years of instinct guided him as he flattened himself to the floor and low-crawled towards the table. In his mind he was among the tall aromatic grasses of the Pleistocene era, a younger sun warming the sleek hair of his pelt, stalking prehistoric springbok. In actuality, the petrochemical modern miracle that is vinyl flooring aided his stealthy and somewhat goofy slide across the kitchen. In a moment, he was under the kitchen table, safe and unseen. He licked his paw, nervously. As the adult female loaded the dishwasher (a gurgling contraption that never failed to belch to life and terrify the kitten just as he took his first lap out of the water bowl, which was inconveniently stationed nearby), the feline Inspector Clouseau clambered up the table leg to the top. The entire mission almost collapsed in

catastrophe when a tablespoon was inadvertently brushed to the floor with his feather-duster tail, but at that very moment the adult female had chosen to call out to the male in the living room. He cowered in fear that his intricate plans had been dashed as she yelled.

“Stuart, the instructor for the hot yoga class called again. She said that people at the gym are complaining about slipping in the pools of sweat and she needs more absorbent flooring.”

She stood motionless for a moment, hands on her hips, half way between the table and the dishwasher awaiting his reply. There was none so much as a grunt, so she yelled to the living room again.

“Stu, are you listening to me? There’s a SWEAT problem!”

“Yeah, yeah—that woman is a nut,” he called back. “I’ll put out more towels.” His voice was full of distracted irritation. A referee’s whistle sounded from the television, and the adult female turned back to the dishwasher.

The kitten’s keen eyes scanned the remaining lunch items scattered about the tabletop. He had only a few seconds to make his choice. Panicked, he thrust his muzzle into the nearest deli wrapper and seized a slice in his small, sharp teeth. With Greg Louganis grace, he leapt from the kitchen table and shot into the living room, his prize gently scraping the carpet as it dangled from his mouth. It wasn’t until he was safely behind the couch that he realized what he had. Baloney, the most pedestrian of sandwich fillers. Not as fancy as liverwurst, and not as horrifying as olive loaf. He had managed to liberate a thin but well-cut slice of what tasted like Boar’s Head brand baloney—or, *bologna*, however *that* was pronounced. He dropped it to the carpet in order to more carefully survey his work. Not too bad, he thought. There was the inevitable damage from having to carry it in one’s mouth, and some carpet fibers from the mad dash across the living room floor, but overall, things looked good. Now, he just had to wait until everyone went to bed.

The little girl's birthday cake sat in a neatly wrapped bakery box on the counter, silently awaiting the next day's festivities. He had watched the adult female show it to her husband after she had picked it up, and the little cat was disgusted to see that the cake was smeared with a conventional sugary frosting. What kind of birthday cake didn't have anchovies, or those crunchy "seafood medley" cat treats scattered liberally on top? Well the least he could do was plop a nice piece of luncheon meat on top to show how much he cared. Once the family had turned in for the night, and the kitchen was dark all but for the moonlight in which he preferred to work, he would nibble away the string securing the birthday cake box and drop his own special gift in amidst the candles. He only wished he had been able to steal some salami instead.

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