

The Chicken Golfers

A Tales of Young Roscoe Story

By William S. Russell III

For C., T., and B.

An hour later, he was still there. The gray kitten had noticed the black and white cat perched on the weathered fence behind the garden just before lunch. The cat may have been there earlier, but the kitten was still pretty small. Without the assistance of a full laundry basket placed auspiciously, he was just not big enough to make the windowsill on his own. As a result, much of what went on in the outside world escaped his attention. Today, the laundry basket was just where it needed to be, so on his way back from the water dish, he was able to clamber up a pile of socks and, stretching small paws out as far as he could, latch on to the curtain and hoist himself, claws and chin first, up to the window for a look. He noticed the stranger right away.

The tuxedo cat was a young male and well groomed for a stray. His coat had a sheen that showed none of the coarseness typical of even an indoor-outdoor pet. He sat motionless, perched atop the fence just a little way from the corner of the garage closest to the garden. He was staring intently at the house. The kitten hunkered down below the windowsill in order to spy on the interloper. Even though the kitten felt sure that he had hidden himself out of sight, he had a creeping suspicion that the tuxedo could still see him somehow, that the cat could see right through the wall and into the house, and that he knew all that was going on inside. The intensity of the stare made the kitten feel as if the window was entirely unnecessary to the cat's perception. Nonetheless, instinct being what it was, the kitten did his best disappearing act, ears folded flat to his head, white whiskers back, fluffy tail twitching slightly as it dangled down from

the ledge behind him. Had the visitor been a dog, a bird, or perhaps even another cat, it was likely that the kitten's sing-song baby feline growl would have risen slowly in his throat, more ridiculous and cute than threatening at this stage in his life. Yet sure as he was that the tuxedo was seeing through the walls, the kitten was also sure that the cat meant him no harm.

The stranger continued to stare, motionless, dispassionately monitoring the house and perhaps beyond it for some greater purpose. So intent were the kitten's thoughts as he observed these events that he nearly jumped clear of his integument when the first golf ball hit the inside wall next to the window with a sharp *THWACK!* As it was—pelt intact—in what would become something of a trademark maneuver, his panicked leap took him backwards and out from the window ledge and down into the laundry basket below, collapsing the pile of socks and partially burying him. A good thing too, as he had not quite pulled himself to the top of the laundry heap to get a look around when the second projectile hurtled by, this one from right behind him with a rising trajectory barely above his head and ending at just the height of the windowsill, which it struck with a resounding crash before shooting back into the hallway to ricochet off the closet door and rocket into the living room and places unknown.

Jingonetti! the kitten thought. Whose idea was *this?! Golf! In the house?! Had both the adult humans take a giant leap away from their senses? This was worse than the infamous water-polo-in-the-sink debacle. Surely, the little girl was responsible for this latest episode of doing something that is a lot fun outside but darn well should never be done inside unless the world is coming to an end or you hit the lottery. He quickly ruled out winning the lottery because there had been no surprised screaming recently (although experience told him that screaming should start at any second). And despite panicking for a moment, he realized that he could rule out the end of the world being the cause of the errant golf balls for exactly the same reason. Still, the*

little girl *had* to be responsible, as she was the only one in the house with the necessarily limited understanding of property values. As it turned out, he was wrong. The little girl was not launching the golf balls at dangerous velocities throughout the house. The chickens were. At that instant the kitten was unaware of that fact. He hadn't even had the time to imagine it when the expected screaming began, and it seemed to be coming from the adult male.

“Oh no! Grace! No! This was a terrible idea! Turn it off, *TURN IT OFF!*”

The kitten scampered to the living room, just in time to hear what must have been a third golf ball blast the vase from the ledge in the front bay window. No great loss there, thought the kitten, as that particular vase often blocked his view of the neighbor's yard. As he rounded the hallway corner to enter the living room, the fact pattern of the current crisis snapped clearly into place. Young Gracie Fisher and her father were in the dining room, playing Poultry Putt, one of Gracie's favorite games.

Poultry Putt had come about almost certainly as the result of a dare from one game designer to another to see who could propose the most insanely nonsensical, mildly dangerous and intensely irritating tabletop children's game in the history of the universe. The game had two players (although having a gallery of chicken golfer fans was encouraged in the rather thin instruction sheet and implied as a necessity in the briefly aired TV commercial). Separated from one another by a distance of a yard or so, each of the players sat behind a motorized plastic chicken that spun in a quick circle atop a slightly elevated miniature putting green complete with hole, pin and a small patch of artificial grass. The spinning chickens would stop at completely random times and launch foam rubber eggs mortar-fashion from rather large openings in their posteriors. The hope (and it was generally a futile hope) was for the chicken posterior to be

positioned in such a way that the foam egg when launched would somehow land in the hole of the opposing players' putting green, scoring an "Egg In One!" as the box top called it. The chickens were even molded in suitably flamboyant golf attire, each looking like a colorful cacophony mixed from the Great Gatsby era and the Norwegian national curling team. In the few times that Gracie's mother had reluctantly allowed the game to be played (it had course been a gift from Gracie's Aunt Susan and Uncle William) the kitten had never witnessed a foam egg land in the hole on the plastic grass putting green. Mostly they just shot all over the place, to the delight of the little girl and dismay of true golf aficionados or anyone else nearby. Absolutely no skill of any kind whatsoever was required to play. Once the chickens were switched on they spun around like dervishes, randomly lobbing eggs in all directions until the plastic egg hopper atop each that was thinly disguised as a golf cap ran dry. All was typically well, however, as the foam eggs were quite soft and completely harmless, having the requisite mass to damage neither furniture nor house pets (as the kitten learned the first time he got too close).

Not so with a regulation Titleist.

This was not good. How had the undoubted legion of corporate lawyers at ConBlotzCo Games, Toys and Rubber Novelties Inc. not seen this potential misuse coming? Surely the internal mechanism of one of the plastic chickens was not designed to be powerful enough to launch a golf ball (light in weight for performance in real golf but certainly heavier than the foam eggs meant for Poultry Putt) across the room at such velocity. What was afoot here? The two had obviously doctored the game, as Mr. Fisher's green was clear across the room from Gracie's. A normal foam egg launch would never have reached it. A man desperately avoiding a list of chores meticulously prepared by his wife, to be completed while she was out, had said to his daughter, who was busily trying to get an "Egg In One!" and otherwise minding her own

business, “That game stinks. Let’s soup it up.” And so the toaster had been sacrificed. The kitten resolved to write an anonymous letter to Mrs. Fisher about the dubious wisdom of running errands without her spouse and child in tow.

Before the kitten could complete his thought, Gracie’s chicken stopped spinning. Both father and daughter froze. Mr. Fisher had been waving his arms frantically from across the room trying to get his daughter to press the “off” switch on her chicken golfer (Chick-Chick Rodriguez, it said on the plastic base) before the next launch, but when the plastic bird stopped whirling the man seized up just like in a game of red light, green light, eyes wide in horror. The back end of the chicken was pointed directly at his nose.

Young Gracie, who had been clapping and laughing maniacally seconds before, shouting “Drive for show, putt for *dough*, Dad!” also ceased all movement. The kitten noticed that she was wearing a T-shirt portraying a sole stick figure, hands to his face, mouth wide in horror with the words; “Oh no! I forgot to turn off the Doomsday Device!” in a cartoon balloon. She had on a plastic pink headband, but her golden hair stuck out wildly in all directions despite or perhaps because of it. Now she was quiet, looking first from her father and then down to the chicken. In the sudden silence, somewhere deep within the bowels of a plastic chicken, a spring went: “Pop!” and the final golf ball in the hopper dropped past Chick-Chick Rodriguez’s colorful hatband and into full launching position below. Like the proverbial deer in the headlights, neither daughter nor father moved a muscle. Sweat beading on his brow, Mr. Fisher slowly closed his eyes waiting for the inevitable. Someone had to do something.

At the top of his little lungs, the kitten screamed, “*FORE!*”

And that broke the spell.

At the very instant that the last golf ball blasted out of the chicken's mechanical innards, Mr. Fisher hit the deck. The golf ball barely missed him, and in what was perhaps the second miracle of the day, it flew straight out the open window of the family room behind him, undoubtedly into the neighbor's yard. In the distance, a Jack Russell terrier barked. For a few minutes, Gracie's father lay quietly on the floor; face down, collecting his thoughts and perhaps saying a quiet prayer to the patron saint of dry pants.

Gracie, however, turned in shock to look at the kitten, who was still poised for action in the doorway to the living room. She had heard him speak. Somewhere inside he knew that this would change everything. He needed time to absorb the event and prepare for the inevitable barrage of questions. Most important, he knew that this should remain a secret between the two of them, little girl and now not-so-ordinary pet. The kitten suspected Mr. Fisher had been busily observing his life flash behind his closed eyes at the moment the kitten had impetuously uttered his warning, and had not seen him speak. The terrified man had probably not even consciously heard him. But Gracie had both heard and seen him. Sharp blue eyes wide as saucers, the little girl turned to him. Now was not the time to go into this. The whole family would wind up in the nuthouse or the AM talk show circuit, and the kitten wasn't sure which was worse.

“Roscoe! You can talk! How—”

Before she could finish, he did the only thing that he could do. He winked at her, shook his head and ran out of the room and hid under her bed.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully. Gracie helped her father straighten up, and by the time Mrs. Fisher got home (with pizza for surprise dinner) the entire Poultry Putt incident was old news. The game had been carefully packed up and stuffed into a far corner of the

basement. When the kitten came into the kitchen to get his evening serving of Mr. Yum Canned Cat Food Product™, the entire family was enjoying their pizza at the table, pizza with extra onions by the smell of it. The kitten tucked into his “seafood tentacle surprise” dinner with gusto. It had been a long day, and he still wondered about the mystery visitor from the morning. He expected that he hadn’t seen the last of the tuxedo.

Only once while eating did he glance up over the rim of his bowl and catch Gracie’s blue-eyed gaze as she sat munching her pizza, feet dangling above the floor and gently kicking in time to the theme song from the Poultry Putt TV commercial as she ate. There was a sparkle in her eye, and she winked at him, secret safe. Things were definitely going to be different from now on.

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