

THE LATER TIMES OF JACK ROOSTER

a very short story by

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The short lived fame of Jack had almost been completely forgotten. You would think that a domestic animal with a genetic compliment to alter the egg-laying size in his prospective mates would be at least, a benchmark in the annals of American farm lore. But no. Sadly, Jack's career as king of the coop had waned until he was irrelevant. The peculiar feature of the eggs he fathered being extremely large had sporadically slowed, then stopped altogether. He was now Jack, the father of chickens hatched from ordinary sized eggs. Farmer Bill now considered presenting Jack with a fatal challenge to his kingdom.

You see, in the miserable life of a domestic rooster, he only wants to do three things: Eat, mate with all the hens, and kill another rooster. Jack's initial climb to the top of the heap was as a fighter. He was undefeated and champion of nine cock fights. That's extraordinary in and of itself considering that the loser, and oftentime the winner also, dies.

Jack was older now, and slower. Farmer Bill wasn't excessively cruel, he just thought that the proper way out for Jack was to die fighting- rather than simply a Sunday dinner for four with very tough flesh. Bill had an appropriate contestant picked out for him. He was a much younger bird, with large thighs and two wins to his credit. Bill was slightly sentimental about Jack, but not too much, after all, raising animals for food is, on its best day, a cold hearted affair for everyone. One just doesn't form lasting affection for the animals we eat. He had Jack in a small cage now, and likewise his opponent- both were given a nice meal of fish head pieces.

Bill made some calls and his friends all soon arrived. Since there was a red-tailed hawk wheeling overhead, the same hawk that had already killed two prime egg-laying hens in the last three days, the decision was made to move the small fighting arena and the folding chairs out of the barn into the yard, so that shotguns could come into play if the hawk attacked more hens. Strangely, even though Bill placed odds at four to one against Jack winning, the majority of bets were that Jack would win- old age and all. Bill handed his shot gun to Bob, then he expertly fastened the spurs on both proposed fighters on their ankles- each with a very sharp one inch blade.

Both roosters screamed at each other from their cages, and postured for battle. Simultaneously both birds were released into the arena. The hawk dived straight for a hen marching her chicks single file towards a shay tree. He struck, pinning the hen to the ground, while Jack fluttered still screaming, and attacked the giant bird with both feet (enhanced by spurs), stunning the hawk, which staggered from its victim, and wobbled there panting. The hawk tried to fly, but could not get aloft. Jack continued his attack, alternately clawing and nipping the much larger bird.

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The Hawk flopped over and Jack crowed loud and triumphant.

Bill and his stunned friends were clapping each other on the back and Bill quickly scooped up Jack and de-spurred him, replacing him in his cage. His would-be contender was also de-spurred and placed in another cage, destined to be a late night supper for Bill's family. Farmer Bill daubed some pine pitch on the hen's wounds and restored her to her chicks.

By unanimous decision Bill was allowed to keep all the money. His friends stayed until ten at night laughing, drinking, and eating fried egg sandwiches. Bill restored Jack to his harem in the chicken coop. Jack had a well earned nap, but still crowed the dawn loud and clear.

And so, Jack rooster did fade away, but unusually retained his dignity as undefeated champion and cock of the roost. And once again, Jack's consorts began laying extremely large eggs.