

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



"Geese!" came the call early one morning last week as the clouds hung dark and heavy, and raindrops tip-toed into the grass.

"What?" was my initial reaction. After all, the flocks of Canadian geese transients had long ago waved their wings over the farm on their way north.

"No! At the pond!" came the details.

Sure enough, on the bank hugging the farm pond stood two majestic Canadian geese. A second look a few minutes later revealed

that two more were in the flotilla cutting "V" shapes across the watery surface.

Before long, they had meandered up toward the barn and were taking stock of the place from the far side of the runoff-control pond. Plenty of tender grass shoots and grain residue from cattle waste in the meadow had provided breakfast nibbling along the way.

Apparently these four feathered friends—two pairs, or maybe four unattached bachelors?—liked what they found. That evening,

they were still hanging around.

But, by that time they had spied grazing grounds more to their liking: the protein-rich, new growth of our most lush hayfield, just below the backyard fence.

Wild geese—or at least the few geese that have stopped by here in their travels—have never come very close to the farm buildings. These were either carefree daredevils or had somewhere in their journeys become accustomed to farmsteads.

While we kept the kitchen windows and the binoculars busy with our shameless, long-distance spying, several of the cats voted for a closer look. They crept under the fence, and began stalking our beautiful visitors through the foot-high alfalfa.

Super-smart birds that they are, the geese, naturally, never missed the move of one cat hair. Four long, black necks were poked

above the thick foliage, their heads turned in the direction of the advancing feline army. It looked for all the world like four weather-vanes pointed into the wind.

Such a stare-down technique eventually halted the advancing cats, with one exception. Rett (no I didn't name him!), beloved housecat, and basically a lover rather than a fighter, would protect his family single-handedly if necessary, against these interlopers. Let the other cat cowards quit; he would press on.

So the tiger-striped advance through the leafy greenery continued, every move watched by the heads sticking out from above the alfalfa. We, too, watched almost breathlessly from the house, just waiting for the fur and feathers to fly. After all, this prey was not a baby house mouse, one of Rett's usual stalking targets.

One ill-conceived dash at these big, fowl strangers and Rett would be sporting a dented heat under his beige-and-black racing stripes.

Five minutes, ten minutes, the standoff dragged out.

And then, a silent truce of some sort was apparently struck. The geese began working their way off through the field, and Rett turned tail, sinking back toward the yard. The classic duel between bird and cat was not going to take the calamitous turn we had feared.

And one cat had more common sense than we originally planned to credit him with.

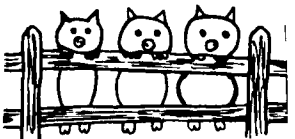
In case anyone ever asks you where the term "Wild Goose Chase" originated, now you know. It was coined by a furry friend of this household who knew when to quit a purposeless pursuit before he was painfully pecked.

Just stash that fact in your "Trivia" file for future reference.

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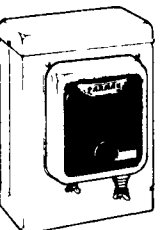
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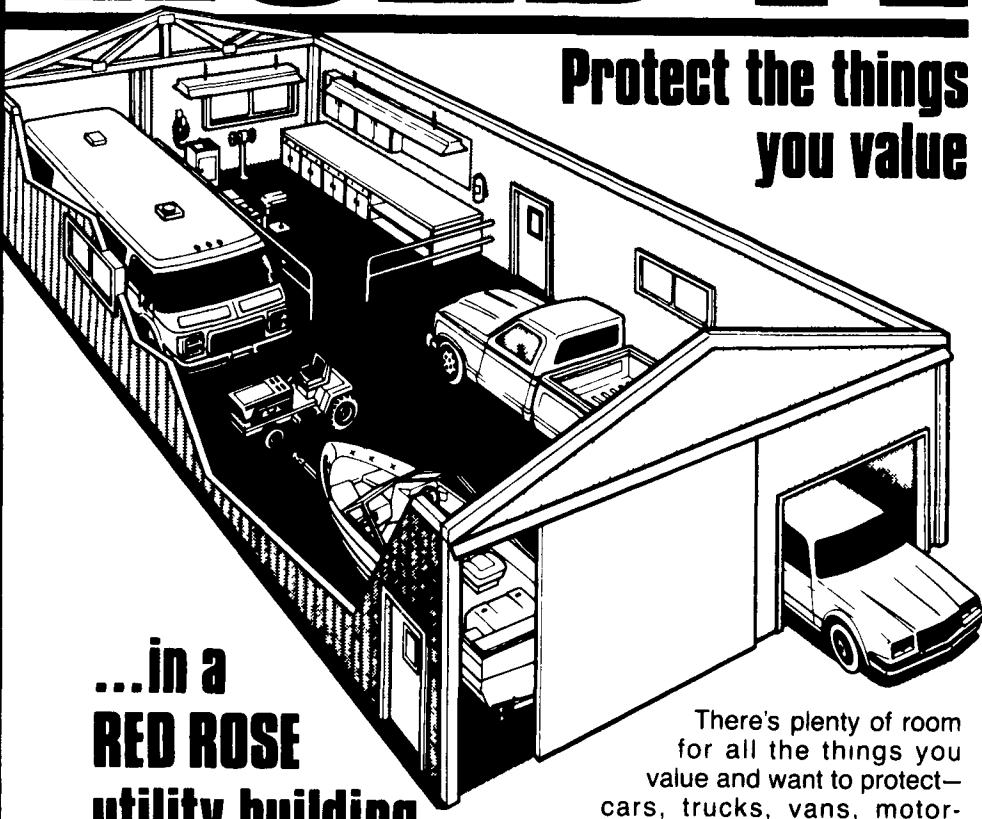
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