# My Brother’s Peculiar Chicken, by Alejandro R. Roces

My brother Kiko once had a very peculiar chicken. It was peculiar because no one could tell whether it was a rooster or a hen. My brother claimed it was a rooster. I claimed it was a hen. We almost got whipped because we argued too much.

The whole question began early one morning. Kiko and I were driving the chickens from the cornfield. The corn had just been planted, and the chickens were scratching the seeds out for food. Suddenly we heard the rapid flapping of wings. We turned in the direction of the sound and saw two chickens fighting in the far end of the field. We could not see the birds clearly as they were lunging at each other in a whirlwind of feathers and dust.

“Look at that rooster fight!” my brother said, pointing exactly at one of the chickens. “Why, if I had a rooster like that, I could get rich in the cockpits.”

“Let’s go and catch it,” I suggested.

“No, you stay here. I will go and catch it,” Kiko said.

My brother slowly approached the battling chickens. They were so busy fighting that they did not notice him. When he got near them, he dived and caught one of them by the leg. It struggled and squawked. Kiko finally held it by both wings and it became still. I ran over where he was and took a good look at the chicken.

“Why, it is a hen,” I said.

“What is the matter with you?” my brother asked. “Is the heat making you sick?”

“No. Look at its face. It has no comb or wattles.”

“No comb and wattles! Who cares about its comb or wattles? Didn’t you see it in fight?”

“Sure, I saw it in fight. But I still say it is a hen.”

“Ahem! Did you ever see a hen with spurs on its legs like these? Or a hen with a tail like this?”

“I don’t care about its spurs or tail. I tell you it is a hen. Why, look at it.”

The argument went on in the fields the whole morning. At noon we went to eat lunch. We argued about it on the way home. When we arrived at our house Kiko tied the chicken to a peg. The chicken flapped its wings and then crowed.

“There! Did you hear that?” my brother exclaimed triumphantly. “I suppose you are going to tell me now that hens crow and that carabaos fly.”

“I don’t care if it crows or not,” I said. “That chicken is a hen.”

We went into the house, and the discussion continued during lunch.

“It is not a hen,” Kiko said. “It is a rooster.”

“It is a hen,” I said.

“It is not.”

“It is.”

“Now, now,” Mother interrupted, “how many times must Father tell you, boys, not to argue during lunch? What is the argument about this time?”

We told Mother, and she went out look at the chicken.

“That chicken,” she said, “is a binabae. It is a rooster that looks like a hen.”

That should have ended the argument. But Father also went out to see the chicken, and he said, “Have you been drinking again?” Mother asked.

“No,” Father answered.

“Then what makes you say that that is a hen? Have you ever seen a hen with feathers like that?”

“Listen. I have handled fighting cocks since I was a boy, and you cannot tell me that that thing is a rooster.”

Before Kiko and I realized what had happened, Father and Mother were arguing about the chicken by themselves. Soon Mother was crying. She always cried when she argued with Father.

“You know very well that that is a rooster,” she said. “You are just being mean and stubborn.”

“I am sorry,” Father said. “But I know a hen when I see one.”

“I know who can settle this question,” my brother said.

“Who?” I asked.

“The teniente del Barrio, chief of the village.”

The chief was the oldest man in the village. That did not mean that he was the wisest, but anything always carried more weight if it is said by a man with gray hair. So my brother untied the chicken and we took it to the chief.

“Is this a male or a female chicken?” Kiko asked.

“That is a question that should concern only another chicken,” the chief replied.

“My brother and I happen to have a special interest in this particular chicken. Please give us an answer. Just say yes or no. Is this a rooster?”

“It does not look like any rooster I have ever seen,” the chief said.

“Is it a hen, then?” I asked.

“It does not look like any hen I have ever seen. No, that could not be a chicken. I have never seen like that. It must be a bird of some other kind.”

“Oh, what’s the use!” Kiko said, and we walked away.

“Well, what shall we do now?” I said.

“I know that,” my brother said. “Let’s go to town and see Mr. Cruz. He would know.”

Mr. Eduardo Cruz lived in a nearby town of Katubusan. He had studied poultry raising in the University of the Philippines. He owned and operated the largest poultry business in town. We took the chicken to his office.

“Mr. Cruz,” Kiko said, “is this a hen or a rooster?”

Mr. Cruz looked at the bird curiously and then said:

“Hmmm. I don’t know. I couldn’t tell in one look. I have never run across a chicken like this before.”

“Well, is there any way you can tell?”

“Why, sure. Look at the feathers on its back. If the feathers are round, then it’s a hen. If they are pointed, it’s a rooster.”

The three of us examined the feathers closely. It had both.

“Hmmm. Very peculiar,” said Mr. Cruz.

“Is there any other way you can tell?”

“I could kill it and examined its insides.”

“No. I do not want it killed,” my brother said.

I took the rooster in my arms and we walked back to the barrio.

Kiko was silent most of the way. Then he said:

“I know how I can prove to you that this is a rooster.”

“How?” I asked.

“Would you agree that this is a rooster if I make it fight in the cockpit and it wins?”

“If this hen of yours can beat a gamecock, I will believe anything,” I said.

“All right,” he said. “We’ll take it to the cockpit this Sunday.”

So that Sunday we took the chicken to the cockpit. Kiko looked around for a suitable opponent. He finally picked a red rooster.

“Don’t match your hen against that red rooster.” I told him. “That red rooster is not a native chicken. It is from Texas.”

“I don’t care where it came from,” my brother said. “My rooster will kill it.”

“Don’t be a fool,” I said. “That red rooster is a killer. It has killed more chickens than the fox. There is no rooster in this town that can stand against it. Pick a lesser rooster.”

My brother would not listen. The match was made and the birds were readied for the killing. Sharp steel gaffs were tied to their left legs. Everyone wanted to bet on the red gamecock.

The fight was brief. Both birds were released in the centre of the arena. They circled around once and then faced each other. I expected our chicken to die of fright. Instead, a strange thing happened. A lovesick expression came into the red rooster’s eyes. Then it did a love dance. That was all our chicken needed. It rushed at the red rooster with its neck feathers flaring. In one lunge, it buried its spurs into its opponent’s chest. The fight was over.

“Tiope! Tiope! Fixed fight!” the crowd shouted.

Then a riot broke out. People tore bamboo benches apart and used them as clubs. My brother and I had to leave through the back way. I had the chicken under my arm. We ran toward the coconut groves and kept running till we lost the mob. As soon as we were safe, my brother said:

“Do you believe it is a rooster now?”

“Yes,” I answered.

I was glad the whole argument was over.

Just then the chicken began to quiver. It stood up in my arms and cackled with laughter. Something warm and round dropped into my hand. It was an egg.