

Olive Senior



Yard Fowl

Rooster

As long as a Rooster somewhere
is angry enough to claw at
the sun blood red rising and
pull it through, day will come:
the world will go on.

Hen

*Woman luck lie a dungle heap, fowl
come scratch it up.*

— Jamaican saying

Some find you loud mouth and simple,
for every egg laid a big announcement
a cackle, some find you
the broody hen, not knowing all
is meant to throw spies off the scent
of your blood's secret: you know
the sky isn't falling, geese don't lay
golden eggs, superior knowledge
resides in the feet.

You are mistress of maps to the under
layer, to buried treasure. Why else
do you nod your head and give thanks
as you sup? With every scratch,
woman's luck you turn up.

Calabash

Senseh

O for a peel-neck hen, one with
ruffled feathers, magic in its feet
to scratch up conjuration. Defeat
the enemy.

One to signal where
the danger lies, so we can root it out
make fresh breeze blow, allow the children to grow.

Ol'people say, every yard must have
a senseh fowl to bring things
into the open, make the wicked pay,
give the people the courage
to try out each new day.

Guinea Hen

In Granny's eyes, our foremost barnyard warrior is not
after all our fierce Rooster or surly Turkey Gobbler
but mild Guinea Hen, her badge of office her spotted
feathers. She stands on guard at that barrier they call
Reputation. For Granny explicating the difference
between Good Girls and Bad always ends her homily
with warning as fact: *Seven year not enough
to wash speckle off Guinea Hen back.*

When Granny holds up Guinea Hen as the symbol
of spoilt reputation, we study her pattern and interpret
Granny's warning to mean: *Not that you can't do so.
Just don't let the world know.
Never let the spots show.*

Owl

'the Owl was a baker's daughter' —Hamlet IV: 5

Owl isn't a yard dweller though it lives in close proximity,
overlooking house and land from its niche in the
breadfruit tree.
I hardly ever see it. Its presence I sense when the air
seems churned into motion at dusk; a pricking
of the skin signaling

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Calabash

the ghostly hunter on the wing. The world seems shaken to
feel Owl measure out the air into quadrants for better
stalking; sift the night for prey.

To the old people Owl is ill-favoured, rider of nightmares
like half-baked dreams sprinkled
with grave dust.

So why do I on some days awaken to a ghostly presence
which does not leave me with dread
but a half-life

of something soothing and warm-scented, a present of
morning's rising crust:
the fecundity of bread.

