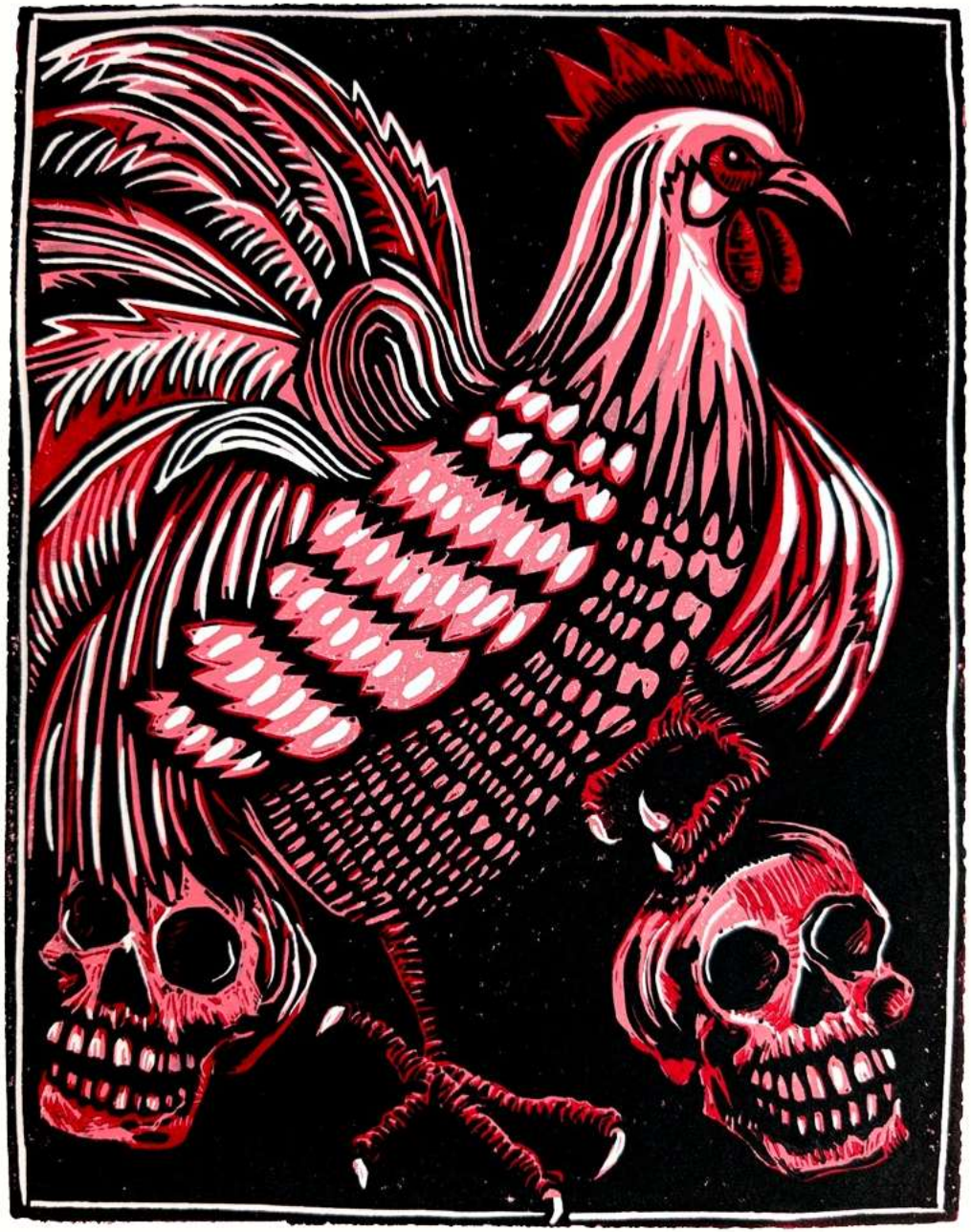

COOP

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Editors' Note

Freedom, identity, violence, death, resurrection and power are maybe not themes you thought you'd encounter in a zine about chickens, but zine 15 touches on all of these and more. While chickens often evoke our sense of silliness, the works in this issue let us linger and brood on the more philosophical or dark side. For these artists and authors, chickens awaken deep passion and pondering.

As with many of our issues, in turning the pages of zine 15, we learn once more that chickens will refuse (both literally and figuratively) to stay within any box you place them in. The depth of this collection is a testament to the vision of our talented contributors whose imaginations and creativity give life to our chicken-theme in new ways once again! Thank you for giving us new questions to ponder and beautiful scenes to engage with. Thank you also to our faithful readers for supporting COOP and taking joy in our poultry-muse as well.

As editors, it is always wonderful to hear the unexpected places people encounter or discover COOP. It seems very fitting for a zine dedicated to a bird that refuses to stay put! Wherever this issue has found you, whether tucked into a cozy corner at home or traveling far beyond the coop, we hope these pages offer you a space to brood, ponder, and imagine! Thank you for being part of the flock!

Leah Mueller's work is published or forthcoming in Rattle, A Certain Age, Writers Resist, Brilliant Flash Fiction, New Flash Fiction Review, Does It Have Pockets, Outlook Springs, Your Impossible Voice, etc. She has been nominated for Pushcart and Best of the Net. Check out more of her work at substack.com/@leahsnapdragon.

Lilli-ann Buffin is a writer and blogger living in Columbus, Ohio. She was a chicken for far too much of her life, but now she writes about them and other stuff at www.alloftheselves.com.

Maylea Harris is a high school senior who loves to write. She enjoys poetry, argumentative writing, and short story writing. She lives in a small farm town in Massachusetts, where all her neighbors have chickens that get loose into her yard. Her mother really wants chickens. She wants peace.

Mouli Sharma is a journalist from New Delhi, India.

Niko Hebron, farmer's daughter, chicken lover, queen of compost. Instagram: @nikohebron

Vishali Muthuvinayagam lives in Chapel Hill, NC. She is a writer and zinester currently working at UNC-Chapel Hill.

COOP

#15

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For submission and publication inquiries please contact us at coop@coopzine.com or visit us on our website, coopzine.com

When finished, please pass on or recycle.

Content Warning:
Some pieces portray violence and/or animal death.
Some pieces contain mild profanity.

Cover art: "Cock-A-Doodle Doom"
by BrunkyArt
11"x14" Linocut Reduction Print

Indigo is a poet who grew up in Tennessee, where chickens inevitably played a part in their early life. Raised in rural spaces, they spent a lot of time reflecting on the smaller details. You can find more of their work on Instagram at @indigoinintrospection.

James Joy (they/them) is a Kenyan poet. They hope to one day have their own farm, full of chicken, full of eggs. Their work ins published or forthcoming in *Dirigible Balloon, ANMLY, Kalahari Review,* and *Black Youth Project,* among others.

Jamie Manias earned their Poetry MFA at Bowling Green State University, where they helped edit *Mid-American Review* and wrote about microbiology. They now apprentice at a letterpress shop, printing stationery and snarky greeting cards. They've been published in *Kismet Magazine, Fruitslice, t'ART*, and elsewhere. Their Instagram is @jamiemanias.

Kiki Adams is fascinated with the structure and patterns of language. She explores these patterns in her professional life as a linguist, but has also been writing poetry since she was a child. She studied linguistics, psychology, and poetry in her hometown at the University of Texas at Austin, and now lives in Montreal, Canada. When not spending time with words, she enjoys lounging in parks, watching sports, and visiting museums.

K. R. Rose is an eco poet and storyteller from Boston, Massachusetts. She loves anything somewhat chicken-shaped from roosters to geese to herons. Connect with Rose at www.krrosewrites.com.

Contributors

Anna Phillips is an Ozarks-Based Writer and Horror Marketer with a passion for native ecology and permaculture. She spends her days surrounded by little feet and talons alike.

BrunkyArt offers vibrant prints, paintings, and relief prints celebrating Texas Hill Country wildlife and folklore, created by Austin artist Jason Wallerstein. Explore the adventure and view the latest original work on Instagram @BrunkyArt and connect across all other social media platforms via Brunky.com.

Cassian Kugler is a current undergraduate at the University of Maine studying English. Cassian often explores shifted realities in realistic settings and tales involving a wide range of folklore. Outside of writing, they can be found out in nature trying to find the nearest Fey Portal.

Christiane Williams-Vigil is a Xicana writer from El Paso, Texas. Her work has been published in anthologies and various literary magazines such as *Somos Xicanas Anthology, Fatal Flaw Literary Magazine, The Write Launch, La Raiz Magazine,* and *Latinx Literatures*. Currently, she is an MFA student for the Creative Writing Program at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Ciro Soleda is a young poet whose work explores myth, memory, and queer identity. He seeks to bridge classical tradition with contemporary experience, hatching intimate landscapes where the personal and the universal meet, ever pecking at the boundaries of language.

Debdutta Pal would rather be watching Netflix, but her brain demands some conscious decluttering. Her work can be found on Medium and Substack.

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The Release of the Chickens

Kiki Adams

Spring enables
the release of the chickens

into rivers of grass
which bubble up in crashing waves,
swallowing rocks and ridges
into their soft depths.

The chickens wade, hiking their feet
up high into their skirts to make their way
from island to island, searching for worms
who swim among the flowerbeds.

The hens congregate in clusters
on the shores under the rose bushes
to make small talk and gossip,
probably about the rooster.

They were shy at first
in the face of such freedom,
but now they disturb the songbirds
and bother the bees

who circle like seagulls.

Elegy for Nugget

Jamie Manias

They peck their dull beaks into the mud
rhythmically, complex metronomes, and sometimes
they pump their tiny wings hard
to lift their plump ruffled bodies towards heaven
(for a moment) and flap harder still
as they fall, tiny Icari, every one.
They do everything together. When one
raises her tail and her bony pinhead
to dash across the mud, the others follow
and they pepper the yard with clucks.
The yellow chicken, Nugget, especially
liked to dig her Harpy-talons into the leaves
and kick like a bull. Who can say
whether they feel a hole in their little sisterhood?
But for a week after the yellow chicken became, suddenly,
the red chicken, they tended to stop
and wait for her.

Providential Night

Ciro Soleda

Avian of the yard, awake — open your adorned eyes
Beneath the jagged, barbed border of your
Cherry-bright crest: caruncle, crimson red.
Discharge your drastic daytime decree,
Explosive, expulsive envoy, ejector of stars.

Sullen forage I frugally offer;
Gallant Giro, you gulp with grateful gusto.
Handsome herald of the hollow hours,
Ideal invoker, incendiary, invincible
Judge of the joust! Jovian in the fray:
Lyrical, you launch your lethal flail:
Martial mandoble, at the Mulato martyr.

Night newly born, you—nested nexus—
Offer yourself, opaque, to the omnipotent occident.
Pennon folded to the patient presage,
Quietude and querencia acquiesce your quivering qualm.

Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

James Joy

A scientist will tell you
evolution proves the egg came first
cracked from a creature
not yet a chicken as we see.

An Indian might tell you
life as a force began from a sacred egg
that rose
out of the primordial ocean.
Shell splitting into sky and earth.

An Egyptian myth tells the story of the first egg,
laid by a celestial bird
on a mound of dirt
incubating Ra,the sun-god
warming the first sunrise.

Perhaps the only truth is: each answer paints a picture,
tells a fuller story

For me, the chicken came first.
Red rooster, crooning, and clucking, and cutting through the morning.
They made me hold it as a child
From my shaking hands, the rooster wiggled half-alive,
sprinting in circles until it finally collapsed.

My cousin says he was too young to remember.

El Gallo

Christiane Williams-Vigil

The soil loosens under his talons. Deep copper tones of clumps break apart into fine powder. The rooster pecks at the ground a few times to try and stir grub from their hiding spots. In the Sierras, the scent of early morning pan and café de olla fills every Adobe home. His feathers look almost black in the low dawn light, and the icy chill of the night forces him to scrunch into himself.

In the days of the ancient Mexica, there were high pyramids that roosters like him would perch on to give their cry. His crow was sacred. It announced the victory of Dios Tonatiuh against the evil, lesser gods who wanted to destroy the sun. Throughout the night, everyone slept in blissful sleep, hopeful that tomorrow they would see the rising sun. The roosters took their charge with pride, and every morning they'd cry out as the Jaguar warriors did after battle. The years rolled on, the Empires fell, and several new ones came and went. Still, the roosters continued to cheer.

In the horizon, a warm glow begins as a thin line, and then it grows, clinging to the soft hues of yellow and pink, converting the atmosphere into blue. The rooster flaps his ruby feathers and soars up onto the brittle, cracked fence post. It's not a pyramid, but it will do.

The sunlight floods the campos, igniting everything in brilliant sudden warmth. The rooster lifts his head up, taking in the last of the icy air and exhaling out his grateful cheer for the forgotten god.

Compost

Niko Hebron

Sit beneath the shaded pine
with its neck twined between
your index and thumb, crossed
and promised. This rooster fought:

your hands bleeding, your face also
bleeding. The bird, blood-full
and pristine. It didn't take much
for you to really get a grip on it,

using its own weight against the
spine. The hens, already settled
and grazing, know no difference.
To them panic passes quickly;

a wave of wings and screams
and shit now calm, waiting. You
have to get going. Chuck the body
into the compost. Pick up the eggs.

The egg came first for him
served on a plate with tea and pancakes
in the tiny hours before the school bus arrived.

Born to be discovered, an egg will always find its way.
And yet, some have never seen a chicken alive
puts things in perspective.

In the end
the answer depends on who is asked.
Paints a portrait
tells a story
and stories never end.

The Chicken Mutiny

Leah Mueller

My mother and I didn't talk much during the summer of ‘76. She reclined in her bathrobe, chain-smoking and re-reading old Mike Royko columns. Mom hated downstate Illinois. She'd always identified with Eva Gabor in Green Acres, who fervently desired a luxury high-rise apartment.

Thirty chickens lived in an enclosed coop behind our house. Their dwelling smelled horrible on stifling afternoons, when direct sunlight heated the fecal/feather mixture on the floor. The penned birds were terrifyingly stupid, prone to flying in my face whenever I opened the henhouse door.

The coop's windows were usually propped open halfway, to allow for air flow. One morning, however, my mother opened them too wide, and the brood escaped into an unfenced portion of the backyard.

When I heard squawking, I rose from my chair. “I think you'd better take a look at this.”

Mom put down her smoldering cigarette and scowled at the backyard. “Those stupid birds.”

The chickens were reacting to their freedom in various ways. Some stood in clusters, clucking and twitching. Others scurried about in a panic, wings flapping, as they tried to figure a way back into their prison.

Mom swooped down on the brood like an avenging falcon. Some of the birds sought refuge under the coop. Others remained immobile, trembling. I lunged forward,

Less and Less Chickens

Indigo

The age-old question
of the chicken and the egg

Tomatoes from the garden
Jelly from the shed

Chickens scratching through the yard

which came first
the cancer or the alcohol

Soon there were
less and less chickens
more and more hospital trips

When you have old parents
that’s normal

To think I once resented
the golden rooster
at the crack of dawn

When the sleep came
before the morning

Prey

Anna Phillips

The specter calls me, yet instinct forces me forward.
Each step an agony,
The futility of my task does not sway me.

Respite could be found, but thinly-veiled hostility seeps
from those more alert. Fate is prolonged to prevent
needless suffering.

It comes for us all, a shadow in the wake of each
individual's path.
My ancient friend creeps closer.
I am set apart- chosen.

The burden of existence weighs me down
Heavy lidded, talons curled
The thick haze is a weighted embrace.

Nature as cruelty; peace in finality
The laws don't change when you can't keep pace. Not for
the one or the many.

Cannibalized by my brethren.
Deplumed as a consequence of my fragility.
My rest is release as burdens are broken at last.

hugged a chicken with both arms, and hurled it into the coop. It fled to the corner and stared at me with a terrified expression. Then it began to peck at its food dish, like nothing unusual had occurred.

Rounding up the chickens proved to be much easier than I'd anticipated. I scooped up one after another, tossing them unceremoniously into their enclosure. They wanted desperately to return to a familiar environment, no matter how squalid and restrictive.

Finally, only one chicken remained, stubbornly wedged underneath the coop. It peered at me with beady, taunting eyes. The little creep was smarter than we were. I longed to see it on a plate with a nice green salad and a baked potato.

I prodded its feathered behind with the prickly straw end of a discarded broom. The bird squawked loudly and raced into my mother's outstretched hands. She pitched it into the coop and slammed the door shut. Victory at last! We even had time to catch our morning Beverly Hillbillies rerun.

Cage-Free

Vishali Muthuvinayagam

She had lovely white feathers draped down her side. They never got as dirty as mine did. I'm not sure how she did it. She had a really kind laugh. To a human, our laughs sound the same, but I could always tell when she was laughing. She stood up against the others like Ralph and Scout. Her head lunged towards Scout that one day. I was scared. Which was weird, because I'm never scared when I'm with her. Chickens kept disappearing. We didn't know what was going on. She was frantic. "Something bad is gonna happen to us, Petunia. I can feel it in my bones." I knew she was right. I just didn't want to admit it. I wanted to focus on spending time together. We spent most of our days figuring out how long we could stay perched on these tall blocks near us. We would fall off the blocks and laugh so loud. I don't think she wanted to be perched high up just for fun. I think she wanted to learn more, and maybe standing high up could help her see. I knew she'd go before me. I didn't think they'd want a scraggly one like me. Everyone kinda forgot when a chicken left. Ralph and Scout would cackle and tease me. "There's only *ever* been six chickens here! What do you mean, someone is missing? Crazy girl!" I'm not sure what kept me remembering, cause we all ate the same food and lived the same days. I think it might have been my love for her that kept me alert. And, I sure was alert when she left.

Does the rooster know?

K. R. Rose

The sun will explode
one day. But hopefully not
tomorrow, at least.

Tomorrow, at least,
the rooster will know first thing:
If he lives, we wake.

If he lives, we wake,
collect another dozen,
scatter grain, sip tea,

scatter grain, sip tea,
sit porch, watch flock—free-range birds.
O, Rhode Island reds.

O, Rhode Island reds:
you're just too peaceful for the
sun to explode you.

Evolution

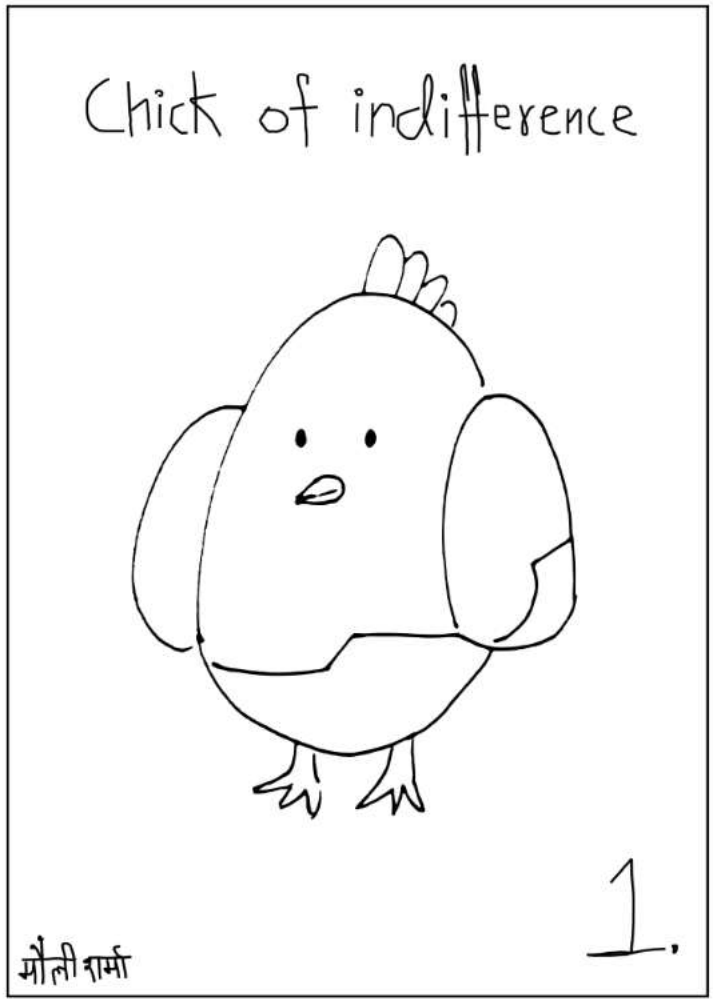
Cassian Kugler

We complex barnyard terrors and our country squire, brilliant chauvinistic in a ruffle of emerald spruce and farmer tans colors. Puffyfluff and all, a ruffled bunch of squawking. An inconsiderate few, always underfoot, razor beak primed for the pecking of bare-ankle flesh. That tamarind shine of both beak and foot, a distant shape seen in those bygone memories of the child's plaything. A reminder of what you call dinosaur, velociraptor aggression, and a mighty presence. Throw your stones and we will eat them, grind out seed into digestible feedstuffs until we are primed to return to that primal, meateater, maneater instinct. Cadmium blood-stained beaks and a rising crow of sun past your lifetimes.

We are origin. We are reincarnation.

Rhode Island Red Chicken

Gallus gallus domesticus



A Tale of Two Chickies

Mouli Sharma

Digitized Pen Sketch

A Tale of Two Chickies

Mouli Sharma

Digitized Pen Sketch

Their feathers were a bland shade,
wattles vibrantly terrifying, when I made snow-angels on
hay,
posture closed, like they didn't want to make friends.
Was that a choice? I wondered aloud,
and their answering clucks sounded the same.

Sand passed through double glass helices,
we became familiar strangers who nodded,
never making circumstances less black and white.
Five days since I'd crossed the threshold
of my throat bobbing with seasons of defeat.

Did she really like it here?
They stage whispered, waiting for a profound summary.
I had much to say,
like, *I learned what family meant from turtles and cows,*
but my mouth mimicked a carcass, refusing to animate.

It offers zero cooperation, twenty-six years later,
when restaurants ask for meal preferences,
my mind still stuck between devouring and sacrificing.

Bird or Broccoli?

Debdutta Pal

Go play with the chickens.
I knew that tone, I knew when to conserve my battery.
A week on a farm wasn't going to tilt the city girl in me,
I liked wide open skies,
fields greener than two crayons, and the static of
    Television just fine,
but even at eight, I knew it wasn't mine.

I didn't want to comfort anything we'd carve for
    tomorrow's lunch.
"Hypocrisy," she enunciated the word, like all others—
a teaching moment.
The smarter I spoke, the more compliments she received,
on a demanding job well executed.

I didn't understand why the ducklings chased me back,
when chickens couldn't leave their spot.
If they didn't like me, I'd certainly remember,
because I know it was the first time I was revolted by
    blood.

You could always switch to vegetables,
they said at the dinner table, laughing before I answered.
Discussion, they called it. *Disappointment*, disagreed my
    heart.
Hunting for sport, my brain would footnote, ten years later.

my broken rooster

Maylea Harris

my rooster who crows at sundown
is nothing more than wasted meat
he keeps the farmers awake, my pigs restless
my hens begging him to come nest

but he screams at the end of the workday
like someone is acknowledging him
(if we do, he'd never stop)
I'll do the same at my time, but it's still annoying

would it be simpler for him to die at the end of my axe?
swift, silent, slicing through worn-out vocal cords
or is it kinder to let him count down his days?
trading a quick death for longer suffering

maybe I'm projecting

Give Me The Bird

Lilli-ann Buffin

I never thought I would say this, but… give me the bird.

I'm not the only one asking. According to the National Chicken Council, in 2018 Americans consumed an average of 93.5 pounds of chicken per person due mostly to the American love affair with rotisserie chicken. But a council of chickens might be dusting the numbers. I can't say for sure. I was late to the game.

Apparently, rotisserie chicken became popular in the 1990s. I was a busy mother hen myself during that decade, cooking my own fingers to the bone. I didn't get into the rotisserie chicken habit until 2015 after my chicks had flown the coop.

What's in that tender, delicious roasted poultry that causes rational consumers to become crazed? During a recent shopping trip, I placed a hot rotisserie chicken on the check-out counter. The woman bagging my groceries went on in great detail about how much she loves rotisserie chicken. I mean LOVES rotisserie chicken. She eats an entire one for lunch EVERY DAY. The male cashier confirmed the bagger's confession and added, "You better not try to ask for a piece neither."

An even more extreme example comes from my closest friends. They tell me about buying rotisserie chickens and becoming intoxicated by the aroma while driving the meat home in their cars. Once they get the birds inside their kitchens, these genteel women tear the hot and greasy meat apart with their bare hands and eat it over the sink.

Each of my friends thinks she is the only one who does this. I am sworn to secrecy, but no need for shame. I am learning the practice is so common that the store might as well include the practice in the serving suggestions. But it does make me wonder: can a product be good for you if it turns civilized women into feral animals?

It's probably too late for me. I've eaten my 93.5 pounds of rotisserie chicken each year. Whatever is in that chicken is now inside of me. Whatever "it" is might also explain why I always seem to be running in circles with egg on my face.

It might not be too late for you. Save yourselves, if you can. As for me, give me the bird.