FOWL



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

Cover art: "The Familiar Rooster"
by Elizabeth W Gasse
Sculpture

chicken memory

Ryan Scariano

I have conceived all the laws that describe the universe. When I was a naked eye. When I was a boy. Where I was in a few hundred years. Oh my, I saw that land of chicken bones, before new trees hung heavy with tender juicy nuggets. Now there are more nuggets in a single supermarket than the entirety of beetles that will ever exist. When I was an egg, mom would stay seated at the table after a chicken dinner and pick clean the bones for the cats. The back door was open, the flies were getting in.

Under the Hen House

Katie Lundebjerg

There's a hunger that reaches out from the depths of my consciousness, scraping at the ends of my mind, crying out to be satiated. Bugs and grain seeds do not quell the screaming.

It only serves to make it worse. Whatever I eat rarely stays down long.

My parents tell me that it's natural to be a little hungry, but the farmer's food is enough. They pet my fur coat with their strange feathers, chiding me to be still as my stomach yearns for more.

Chunks of fur fall off, and their beaks scratch at my ribs when they try to preen me. I don't know why they bother. Ticks don't feed on shambling bodies at the brink of death.

They hide me away in the back of the coop, into the darkest corner, whenever the farmer comes to collect the eggs and bring the grains. It's better this way. To stay in my little hole, the one I sleep in underneath the coop, because the farmer doesn't share the flock's love for me.

My paws, with toes and pads, are so different from their clawed feet as I continue to dig deeper under the coop. The darkness of the pit deepens as I continue to dig, consuming me as I hide away.

I am desperate for release as the days drag by.

Until something from the pit of my stomach bursts free. Calling me to run past the farmer and through the metal strings wrapped around poles. Into the woods I go

and it falls silent as my feet come to a stop at the body of another chicken.

A creature, who looks like me, had a red stain on his teeth. He looked healthy. Whole. Full coat. Eyes that aren't cloudy.

I look between him and the body of the chicken on the ground.

The eyes of my family flash before my mine, briefly, before the hunger takes over. I cautiously approach him.

He looks at me with pity and leads me towards a coop with red wood instead of brown wood like mine. I hear the familiar clucking and cooing as I stand outside the door.

My mouth waters. Something primal claws its way up my throat and it's not grain. The world around me fades as I give in. Bawks, squawks, shrieks. Feathers. Red.

The screaming inside of me goes quiet.



Lanturn

Tinychickens/Dezi

Digital

She Collects the Eggs

John Grey

An owl
is woken by moving shadow,
a young girl with a pail.
The bird swivels its head.
An unwelcoming glare grips her
as if eyes are talons.

Outside the barn,
rain falls, mists the air.
Fence posts sag under the weight of sky.

She collects eggs.
The hens briefly panic.
She leaves to a chorus of hoot and cluck.

The path home is chilly and wet
but the eggs are warm against her chest.
The owl, like the barn,
falls back to sleep.

The Chickens Will Kill You

Kathryn Hemmann

It's difficult to remember a time before internet use was widespread. For better or worse, you can look up just about anything these days. Back in the 1990s, though, rumors were absolute. You couldn't prove any given whisper you heard on the playground; but, then again, you couldn't *disprove* it either.

For me, *Ocarina of Time* wasn't so much a video game as it was an uncharted wilderness. I wasn't old enough to play the game properly, and I had to ask older kids for help. I didn't understand their advice any better than I understood the game itself, but a passing comment made by a friend's brother stuck with me: *the chickens will kill you*.

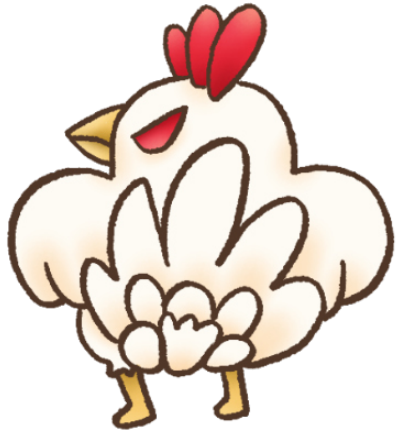
He didn't offer any explanation, so my mind filled in the blanks with the worst possible scenarios. The seemingly idyllic Kakariko Village became a place of horror, filled as it was with free-roaming fluffy white chickens. I imagined them to be hypervigilant as they waited for an opportunity to dart forward and tear Link to shreds.

There are plenty of monsters in *Ocarina of Time*, but they all made a certain type of sense. If there were giant spiders in the dungeons, then of course there were. Where else are giant spiders supposed to live? If there were desiccated zombies dragging their broken limbs through the dark sludge at the bottom of the village well, that was fine with me. Is a subterranean torture chamber not a reasonable place to find zombies?

But those chickens really scared me. They just seemed so normal, and that was the problem. What were they hiding? What sort of malice lurked behind their vacant little eyes? How *would* one of these fat waddling birds manage to kill a human child?

A decade later, I watched a video showing what happens if the player attacks a chicken enough times to make it angry. The bird squawks to the heavens, summoning a flurry of its fellows to descend on Link, clucking and cooing as they chase him around the screen. It's very cute and extremely silly.

The absurdity of the situation managed to dispel whatever lingering fear I might have harbored regarding the killer chickens. Still, I'm haunted by the memory of taking a playground rumor so seriously that it gave me nightmares, and to this day I make a point of giving video game animals the respect they deserve.



"The Chickens Will Kill You"
Kathryn Hemmann
Digital

Lambo

Paulette Hampton

Lamborghini was an Ayam Cemani Rooster, my uncle's prized cock.

"Its feathers are black, its beak is black," Uncle Rob smiled proudly, "even its internal organs are black."

Uncle Rob named the rooster Lamborghini. He said it cost as much.

The other chickens on Uncle Rob's farm were jealous of the metallic sheen emanating from Lambo's ink-black feathers, spreading rumors that he was strange and held mystical powers.

Lambo heard the hens' gossip as he walked the farmyard. Their narrow eyes followed him as their small brains concocted outlandish stories of his upbringing and misadventures.

It was the talk of the farm when Janie, one of the older hens, laid eggs after a rendezvous with Lambo. The eggs weren't black but cream-colored. They chattered that the eggs were black as night, but Lambo's mystical powers cloaked them to resemble normal eggs so as not to worry the mother.

When Janie fell ill and died, the other chickens blamed Lambo's mystical powers for infecting her bones, her life taken as punishment for falling under his unearthly spell.

No hen would warm those eggs. They lay uncovered and vulnerable to the chilly night air, the embryos denied the essential energy needed for their development. It was whispered that if a chicken sat on those eggs, they would fall ill just as Janie did.

As the chickens watched the eggs, waiting for entropy to claim them, Lambo covered their beige shells with his shimmering ink-black feathers, hoping to warm the beings inside into existence.

The hens flew into a frenzy, insisting that they were right all along. That Lambo was indeed strange and mystical. Why else would a rooster kill the mother hen and warm his own eggs?

Each day, Lambo willed the heat of his body to encase the chicks inside the shells so they would grow, and soon chip the eggshells open with excitement. Lambo was patient, sitting day in and day out, waiting for movement beneath his wings. But none came.

The chicks never emerged and the rumors about Lambo's mystical strangeness died because his fatherly dedication bored the chickens.

Closing his shiny black eyes, Lambo passed away, still sitting on the nest. The chickens say he never left it, hoping to hatch his chicks so that, at last, he would finally be loved.

Egg Bound

Ciro Soleda

Today my baby will come out of me
Sheltered by calcium and albumin,
And I'll sit upon the cold rock
That holds his body.
Today I'll be diligent and proud…

Today came and he's not out.

In my broody mind I heard him cry.
I sat and sat so he'd be warm
And felt him trapped, drowning and bloody,
Yolk-hungry and helpless.

I got boney, got fluffed up and fretted,
And, so love-tight, I held him…

Today my baby will come out in me.



Hens Grazing

Sammy Oliver

Linoprint

Contributors

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.

Elizabeth Gasse is a sculpture artist working in both polymer clay and ceramics. She loves animals of all kinds, but has a special connection with chickens, which she raised as a child.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Midnight Mind, Willow Review* and the *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*. Latest books, *Bittersweet, Subject Matters* and *Between Two Fires* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the *MacGuffin*, *Touchstone* and *Willow Review*.

Katie Lundebjerg is a special education teacher and a fencing coach in the city of Albuquerque. She is a graduate student at New Mexico Highlands University in their teacher preparation program. Her written work has appeared in *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* and *Folk Tales: A Writing Theory Community Zine*.

Kathryn Hemmann lives at the center of a labyrinth of bookshelves in Philadelphia, where they write stories about the gentle horrors and hidden mysteries of everyday life. They post about comics and video games as @kathrynthehuman.

Paulette Hampton is a multi-genre writer who writes paranormal, memoir, and sci-fi novellas. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines such as T*ypo Magazine, Disturb the Universe,* and *Suburban Witchcraft*.

Ryan Scariano's most recent poetry collection is *Flicker Noise*, a collaborative chapbook with the poet Henrietta Goodman (Bottlecap Press, 2024). He serves as an assistant poetry editor for *Narrative Magazine* and lives in La Grande, Oregon. www.ryanscariano.com

Sammy Oliver is a queer southern writer and lino artist. They grew up on a farm with a gaggle of hens, and they still have a couple of their own. Their writing can be found on honeygaze.com, and their other lino projects can be found on Etsy at honeygazemarket.

Tinychickens/Dezi is a midwestern low res pixel artist and chicken blogger. Dezi enjoys horror and the darker things in life and isn't afraid to add an avain twist to the genre. Tumblr: homeofhousechickens

Find more at coopzine.com

Cover Art
The Familiar Rooster
by Elizabeth W Gasse
Sculpture