

*Olive Senior*



## Yard Fowl

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### *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.

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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

—//—  
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.

