

SELECTED FLASH FICTION

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ALDROVANDI'S CHICKENS

The Overture

Señor Juan Jose was seated in one of the few shaded spots in the garden of his home, the Casa Gallo Joven in the Calle Caliente, the place of his birth.

Taking advantage of the dappled cover provided by an ancient olive tree, a large cockerel was vigorously preening himself nearby. The feathers to which he was giving such

meticulous attention were gold laced and hung around his nape like a gorget.

The man watched the bird through chestnut brown eyes that sparkled with a vigour that belied his age. The bird regarded the man through similar bright eyes that were testimony to the eight months that he had strutted the world since emerging from the egg.

It would have been clear to a reasonably astute observer that man and bird understood one another reasonably well.

For his part, the bird had mastery of the garden. Nothing

escaped his notice. No hen avoided the side-stepping, dropped-wing dance that was a prelude to treading. No male escaped a drubbing.

The man, however, had the mastery of the bird. Corn flew from his hand at about three hours past the meridian each day. He placed water in the big white basin each morning and in

winter, broke the thin ice that sometimes formed there, with his hand.

He also

kept the bird away from another part of the garden where the dogs waited hopefully. He would indeed, at some time in the future, murder almost all of his male offspring without a qualm.

It should perhaps have been apparent to any observer of this falsely rural idyll that any conversation must be a monologue and yet it was the cockerel who spoke first.

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WRITER SNOTES

ULISSE ALDROVANDI wrote an ornithology of chickens in 1600 as part of a larger work on birds. Unlike biologists today, he saw the value of his work and his observations to be in their application to all human activity. These short tales of fiction are an expression of that intent, drawing ideas from Aldrovandi's work.

Below is a Gold Partridge Brahma cockerel of about eight months: the model for the cockerel in the tales.

