

ALDROVANDI'S CHICKENS

ABOVE US ONLY CLOUDS

Although he could not exactly recall the time when he had not kept chickens, Señor Juan Jose would have said that before them his world was fairly flat. Flat, that is in the two-dimensional sense. Flat in the context of a disk carried on the back of a giant tortoise. Flat in the sense that above, there were only clouds.

Certainly, it was true that occasionally he might have scanned the skies to mark the passage of wild birds or to remark on some lofty peak. He might have look upwards even to consider imposing architecture. Fundamentally though, to Juan Jose, everything that was above had been benign.

Of course, this was an illusion that the man in his arrogance had created for himself. The truth was terrifying: death moved across the heavens. Phoebus' chariot alone was there ready to bring down the unwary, the unprepared or the disadvantaged. Raptors hung on the thick air and dived with incisive skill through the gaseous sea to slash with beak and claw. The birds knew this of course and that was how, over time, the aging Señor had come to understand it himself.

Through the innumerable bifurcations of evolution, the progenitors of the humble chicken had learned to use their eyes independently. One to watch land and air for predators and the other to seek for food. Those two key functions needed to support the prime directive to breed.

Now as a heron swooped low in heavy flight in search of more slippery prey, the cockerel called out his aerial alarm and nearby a dozen hens all stood up sharp and froze. When there was no further sound, the hens did not all migrate to the shelter of the trees where the rooster waited. Instead, the heron continued with its languorous beat and the birds resumed their pecking, heads down and fluffy rumps pointing skyward. The rooster had already resumed his watch.

"Indeed, I am getting old," said Juan Jose to nobody in particular as the bird looked at him through one uncertain eye.

WRITER SNOTES

CONTINUUM

This is the third piece of flash fiction on Aldrovandi's Chickens. An awareness of aerial dimension in a species that cannot fly.

PREVIOUSLY ON ALDROVANDI'S CHICKENS

A Confusion of Crows considers the differences, or perhaps lack of differences, between the language of humans and that of the humble chicken. We consider ourselves apart but in fact we are not.

MEDIA

Rooster crowing



AUTHOR

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