What We Did with the Chickens

Carol Potter

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
in some brand new country, the way the sky stayed lit
all night long and you lying beside me. The next morning
I told you about driving the chickens to the upper
pasture and we both laughed
because at that moment
it looked easy. I didn’t tell you I couldn’t sleep,
didn’t tell you about the woman crying or the car
idling three stories down or the rain falling
all night. When you think of me, I want you to see me
sitting tall on the back of a tremendous, dark horse—
how easy I ride that horse
while my brothers and I, laughing,
herd 200 chickens into the upper pasture.
I want you to look up and see the white chickens
clucking through an acre of green—

400 white wings glinting in sunlight.
The chickens, dignified.
The children, beautiful.

**What We Did with the Chickens**

After eating Moo Goo Gai Pan at a table with two women
we had never seen before, having heard about one woman’s
heart condition and her husband’s difficulty
with his neck, how it bent one way but not the other, then the other
woman
told of the dress she bought for her niece’s wedding and why they
didn’t
go skiing last winter, my daughter and I went out on the street
and stood staring into the window of a Chinese grocery.
There was a bin of pickled chicken feet as if the birds had bit themselves at the leg where some trap held, then hoisted themselves out of Chinatown where we stood wondering how one could eat those feet or the stripped gut of fish laid out in the bin next to the feet. It would have been amazing to have seen that flock fly up over Boston with their white wings and legs with no feet, bare stubs dangling down; awkward as chickens are in the air, inept with their wings even though they can run down roads with no heads at the tops of their necks delighting small children and the boy with the ax.

The boy with the ax was my brother.

We had a barn full of chickens.

I thought it was all those eggs forming inside their bodies kept them clumsy in air, the way they flapped so hard when we chased them; fat like they had another world lodged inside their bellies, a second kingdom coming.

Clucking, their yellow beaks clicked all day long. That sound rolled through our sleep like water running as if someone was informing us, whispering in our ears, “This is it, this is it.”

I thought the sound itself might one day be enough to inflate the barn like a balloon, lifting the barn and 200 birds straight up into the sky and there would be no more birds pecking at our feet, no more standing in the cellar sorting eggs, cleaning specks of shit off shells.

One night after a storm, there was a sound in the trees made me think the barn was shifting on its joints.

I thought I could hear 400 wings opening wide in the dark.
Sitting up, I could see each one of us suddenly free, delivered like it was possible to swallow so much air the body could float out of any conversation—straight up from the spot, see you later—we'll talk about it—good-bye.