

A Call from the Wild

by [Robert Gear](#) (July 2023)



Chicken Hung Before a Brick Wall, Chaim Soutine, 1925

I was once a man of the *homo sapiens* variety. I lived with my family in Mid-Western farm country raising three hundred and sixty acres of corn, beans and soy; a few goats and a flock of chickens mooched around the farmhouse acreage.

Perhaps I ingested something growing by the side of our fields. That may be the cause, I can't be sure.

One morning I heard the roosters crow and awoke as usual and stretched my limbs. Except I noticed something odd. My arms brushed against the wall and I heard a rustling sound and felt as though I was touching feathers. Strange, I thought.

You probably can't guess what happened next. I opened my eyes and peered back, and yes, my fingers had become feathery. They were a soft gray color. My body felt like a chrysalis unwrinkling on a milkweed. I was still dreaming, then.

But I heard the day calling, so I hopped out of bed. Did I say 'hopped?' Yes, for that is what I did. I found myself standing on two splayed talons, each with three pointy toes ending in sharp nails.

Someone knocked.

"Come on, Morris. We have the north forty to work. Time is like an ever rolling stream; it waits for no man."

"Ok, I'm coming, Pa," I replied. But the words sounded odd. They weren't words. They were screeches, like the sound made by the scratchy needle on 'His Master's Voice' gramophone records.

I pinched myself to see if I was dreaming. But instead of a pinch it felt more like I was brushing something soft.

I sat down on the floor and waited. You might think I would panic at this predicament. But that is not how it felt. It was

a feeling of exhilaration.

"Morris, it's time to get up. Rise and shine. Didn't you hear the alarm go off?"

I made a sound like a trampled cockroach. But Pa must have already gone downstairs not waiting for an answer.

I fluttered back onto the bed in order to get a look outside through the window. The world was the same, or was it? The big world was out there and I felt a glow of joy on perceiving the hens pecking at insects and grain on the frosty ground. Why was that? I usually took little notice of them, but now I thought I could distinguish each and every one—by name: a strange world of unexpected visions. I could see Old Jim Crito feeding his chickens over the way.

What would my family think? I could smell the coffee and the eggs frying, and noticed I was hungry—but that breakfast did not appeal. Then I spotted a wriggling centipede on the floorboards by the bed and went for it like a demented John Deere Front-End Loader, beak first. Yum.

"For the last time, Morris. Let's get out there. Work to do, son!" That was Pa.

I squeaked out something which hardly reached him. He burst in and stood in the doorway. His face betrayed surprise at seeing a chicken of indeterminate gender looking out of the window at the emerging light.

"Aww, heck! Who let that darned chicken in?" he called out, and seeing no human body must have assumed I had left before sunrise.

I allowed him to pick me up and tramp down the stairs and thrust me outdoors among my new kind.

My brain took time to adjust, it was divided between human and poultry bits; in a word I was a transchicken: a *pullum*

sapiens; or given that I had evidently trans-specied (and not trans-gendered), a *gallum sapiens*. This soon became clear when a harem of chickens following my every move, clucking as in real life.

As I mentioned, I must have ingested something.

Was I happy in this new plumage? Looking back on this transitioning from the vantage point of relative invulnerability, I would say that it gave me lots of leverage. I had (almost) the mind of a human, but my physical attributes were entirely avian. My breed was 'Brahma' and my color was buff (and according to the *Get to Know Your Chickens* Website), my temperament was docile—which is not true by the way. Also I was very tall and beautiful and could intimidate small children. Later I learnt how to be persuasive to humans of the adult kind.

Where was my family in all this? I listened to their grieving. At first they had assumed I had eloped with the daughter of a neighboring farmer. That was one idea that was quickly abandoned when she was questioned. Anyway, didn't they know that Luella was not my type? What was *their* pronouns anyway?

When I hadn't reappeared after several weeks the family started to understand that this was a longer-term agenda; or should I say 'narrative?' After a few weeks their initial lamentations became more subdued. Even Ma came to believe I wasn't coming back, and the family returned to their occupations. Of course, not one of them suspected I was pecking around outside in the yard, picking up inconvenient ideas and worms.

I thought of writing a note to the effect that their boy Morris, had turned into a rooster. There were problems with that approach. First, how could I write without access to a writing tool, and more significantly without the use of fingers and thumb? I gave up that idea anyway, since the other

rooster in the barnyard, whose name was Leroy, or some such, came at me like a BCM (Black Chickens Matter) supporter, which he may have been. You see, I had encroached on his territory.

I lost that fight easily and felt humiliated. But I did pick up some clever tricks that I still use when engaging with others—be they human or merely plastic or porcelain chickens.

And then one day something momentous happened. A berobed maniac, looking like Old Jim Crito, strode up the driveway. He clutched a sword in his right hand, and fetched a look of triumph in my direction.

“Finally, I have you. You are the sacrifice I have been seeking for the last two thousand four hundred and nineteen years.”

This was pretty much all Greek to me but my chicken brain was able to make sense of it somehow. His own master’s last voice had uttered something about killing a chicken which may have meant many things—or indeed nothing, He was intent on taking literally the words of this ancient mentor.

“But, sir, Mr. Crito, in killing me you will only succeed in spreading my hybridity.” I thought I’d warn him at least.

“There are many more Cock-a-Doodle-Doos waiting in the wings, and many of them will have a similar name and get up to the same old tricks.”

And with that my head went flying across the barnyard. Blood spurted out from the severed neck, and I continued strutting as chickens are wont to do. I remember thinking that the severed neck business was a useful tactic, and that this could go on for a long time. My beak uttered a few important phrases in a foreign tongue, then I briefly thought I’d write a book about it; then remembered that I couldn’t write. Oh well, someone would copy down my words.

You may think it was all over, but the next instant I was

brought back into the living world again. My tendency could not be expunged. I was now stronger and larger, my new plumage bright and vigorous, my spurs fully developed. Under cover of darkness I crossed the country road and made my way to the lights of the beckoning city.

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