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ROOSTERS

At four o'clock
in the gun-metal blue dark
we hear the first crow of the first cock

just below
the gun-metal blue window
and immediately there is an echo

off in the distance,
then one from the backyard fence,
then one, with horrible insistence,

grates like a wet match
from the broccoli patch,
flares, and all over town begins to catch.

Cries galore
come from the water-closet door,
from the dropping-plastered henhouse floor,

where in the blue blur
their rustling wives admire,
the roosters brace their cruel feet and glare

with stupid eyes
while from their beaks there rise
the uncontrolled, traditional cries.

Deep from protruding chests
in green-gold medals dressed,
planned to command and terrorize the rest,

the many wives
who lead hens' lives
of being courted and despised,

deep from raw throats
a senseless order floats
all over town. A rooster gloats

over our beds
from rusty iron sheds
and fences made from old bedsteads,

over our churches
where the tin rooster perches,
over our little wooden northern houses,

making sallies
from all the muddy alleys,
marking out maps like Rand McNally's:

glass-headed pins,
oil-golds and copper greens,
anthracite blues, alizarins,

each one an active
displacement in perspective;
each screaming, "This is where I live!"

Each screaming
"Get up! Stop dreaming!"
Roosters, what are you projecting?

You, whom the Greeks elected
to shoot at on a post, who struggled
when sacrificed, you whom they labeled

"Very combative..."
what right have you to give
commands and tell us how to live,

cry "Here!" and "Here!"
and wake us here where are
unwanted love, conceit and war?

The crown of red
set on your little head
is charged with all your fighting blood.

Yes, that excrescence
makes a most virile presence,
plus all that vulgar beauty of iridescence.

Now in mid-air
by twos they fight each other.
Down comes a first flame-feather,

and one is flying,
with raging heroism defying
even the sensation of dying.

And one has fallen,
but still above the town
his torn-out, bloodied feathers drift down;

and what he sung
no matter. He is flung
on the gray ash-heap, lies in dung

with his dead wives
with open, bloody eyes,
while those metallic feathers oxidize.

St. Peter's sin
was worse than that of Magdalen
whose sin was of the flesh alone;

of spirit, Peter's,
falling, beneath the flares,
among the "servants and officers."

Old holy sculpture
could set it all together
in one small scene, past and future:

Christ stands amazed,
Peter, two fingers raised
to surprised lips, both as if dazed.

But in between
a little cock is seen
carved on a dim column in the travertine,

explained by *gallus canis*;
flet Petrus underneath it.
There is inescapable hope, the pivot;

yes, and there Peter's tears
run down our chancleer's
sides and gem his spurs.

Tear-encrusted thick
as a medieval relic
he waits. Poor Peter, heart-sick,

still cannot guess
those cock-a-doodles yet might bless,
his dreadful rooster come to mean forgiveness,

a new weathervane
on basilica and barn,
and that outside the Lateran

there would always be
a bronze cock on a porphyry
pillar so the people and the Pope might see

that even the Prince
of the Apostles long since
had been forgiven, and to convince

all the assembly
that "Deny deny deny"
is not all the roosters cry.

In the morning
a low light is floating
in the backyard, and gilding

from underneath
the broccoli, leaf by leaf;
how could the night have come to grief?

gilding the tiny
floating swallow's belly
and lines of pink cloud in the sky,

the day's preamble
like wandering lines in marble.
The cocks are now almost inaudible.

The sun climbs in,
following "to see the end,"
faithful as enemy, or friend.

—Elizabeth Bishop

Roosters

for Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, and Piano

Elizabeth Bishop

Juliana Hall
(b. 1958)

Disquietingly (♩ = 63)

Soprano

Mezzo-Soprano

Piano

p

4

p

At four o'clock in the gun-metal blue

p

*

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8 *p*

At four o'clock in the gun-metal blue
dark we hear the first crow

11

dark just below the gun-metal blue
of the first cock and immediately

15

pp

win - - - dow off _____ in the dis - tance,

there is an ech - o _____

18

$\text{♩} = 88$

mf

then one,

$\text{♩} = 88$

mp

then one from the back-yard fence, *mf*

with

$\text{♩} = 88$

mp

mf

21

f

with hor - ri - ble in - sist - ence,

f *p*

hor - ri - ble in - sist - ence, grates like a

f *pp*

Ped. *

24

mp

from the broc - - co - li

wet match

mp

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

27 *mf* patch, *f* flares, _____

f flares, _____ flares, _____

mf

f Ped. * Ped. *

29 *mf* and all o - ver town _____ be - gins _____ to

mp flares, _____ flares, _____ *mf* all o - ver town, all o - ver town

mp

31 *f*

catch. _____

f *gliss.*

catch _____ catch. _____

f *ff*

Ped. *Ped. *Ped. *Ped. *

33 *ff*

Cries _____ ga - lore _____

ff *mf*

Cries ga - lore _____ come from the

8va *8va*

mf

Ped. *Ped. *Ped. *Ped. *Ped. *

35 *mf*

from the drop - ping - plas - tered hen - house floor, -

wa - ter - clos - et door,

(8va)

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

37

p

where in the

pp

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

39

mp

their rus - tling wives ad -

blue

blur,

blue

Ped.

* *Ped.*

*

41

mp

mire,

the roost - ers

mp

blur

the roost - ers brace

p

Ped.

*



43

brace their cru - el feet and

their cru - el feet and glare

45

glare

and glare with

mp

p

47 *mf*

with stu - pid eyes

stu - pid eyes

mf

Ped. *

49 *f*

while from their beaks there rise the

while from their beaks there rise

f

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *