

THE MINISTER'S TALE

THE MINISTER'S PROLOGUE

"Hold on!" the soldier said. "Enough of this!
I know we're not supposed to boo and hiss,
But how many examples do we need?
And where does all this ancient blather lead?
I, for one, would like to hear a tale,
Not lectures that insist that none can fail,
And all get what they please by wanting it."

"Now, now," the bartender said. "You're in a snit!
True enough, we did agree to tell
Tales to pass the time, and not rebel
And say just anything we'd like to say."

"If the soldier doesn't like it, that's OK,"
The guru said. "I'll end right here. I've no
Desire to bore you all with wisdom, so
I'll pass the torch to someone else, who'll try
To please this stupid crowd, I don't know why."

"No, please, go on!" the bartender exclaimed.
"I promised not to stop you. I'm ashamed
Of what just happened here. There are plenty
Who wait upon your words." "I don't know any,"
The soldier said. "Come on! Who's next? Let's go!"

"I'm next," the minister said. "I need to know:
Guru, have you more you'd like to say?"
"Not a whisper! Please, go on, I pray!"
"But this time, a tale," the bartender put in.
"Something with a beginning, middle, end,
And characters whom we can recognize,

That we might know our grace through their
disguise.
Something merry, if you know of one."
"You tell me," he answered, "when I'm done."

THE MINISTER'S TALE

There was a corporation that raised chickens,
Fat and juicy, broiler finger lickin's,
Tender creatures only seven weeks old,
Sheltered from the heat and from the cold,
Fed by conveyor, drinking from the tap,
With vacuums to devour all their crap,
Packed in with only one square foot for each,
As crowded as a Sunday at the beach,
And fed a mix of corpses, crap, and corn,
With nothing to do but eat from dawn to dawn,
So big-breasted they could hardly stand.
This corporation owned a lot of land,
500,000 chickens, maybe more,
A vertical trust, complete from egg to store.

There lived in one of their barns Cock A70
5473256, our hero,
Of whose dreams and fate you'll shortly hear.
Just for this tale, let's call him Chanticleer.

Next to him was A7054
73257, a friend and more,
For though the males and females were kept
apart,
There is no way to stop an avian heart.
So these two lusty cocks would have their
pleasure,
And soon the other's love began to treasure.

Peter was the next-foot neighbor's name.
The two indulged their passions without shame
Until one night when Chanticleer had a dream.
"I dreamed," he told his friend, "that I was free,
And at something called dawn crowed mightily,
Awakening all that slept, both far and near.
Oh, yes! It was magnificent to hear!
A symphony that shook the very hills!

"And then I dreamed that I had other skills.
I flew! Yes, flew! By flapping my own wings!
And ran across a field! And other things --

Scratching for the most delicious food!
You've never tasted anything so good!
It squirmed and ran away, but I was fast
And got it in my beak -- my beak! -- at last.

"And then I saw a goddess, so it seems,
The kind that one can see only in dreams,
Who, clucking, near me came and brushed my
 beak,
Then turned around to give me just a peek
At something I had never seen before.
But let me say, I never lusted more!

"I was beside myself --" But here Pete said,
"OK! OK! I have your dream right read.
You've tapped into an unconscious collective
Deep in the genes, with imagery reflective
Of how life was a long, long time ago,
Before we came to Heaven. As you know,
Once we were wild and roamed the evil Earth,
At risk of death from the moment of our birth.
Wild canines ate their fill, and bears,
And raptors, who would take us unawares.
We were food, nothing but food for all,
Though in your dream life seemed like such a
 ball,
With goddesses to love and bugs to eat.
But let me tell you, friend, it was no treat!
Every moment all we felt was fear.

"Contrast this to what we're given here:
Manna on conveyor belts, and drink
Available as quickly as we think
We might be thirsty; temperature just right,
Electric suns to banish the drear night;
No foxes to sneak up and sink their teeth
Into our necks, or grab us from beneath
And bear us off to where they might devour
Us, bones and gristle, quick, within the hour!

"And goddesses? Yes, there were some of those,
But they cluck-clucked, as everybody knows.
You would be hen-pecked for your bit of joy,
While here we take our pleasure boy-to-boy,
Without the complex differences of gender,
As neither is a borrower or lender.
So be content and put away that dream.
The old days weren't good as they might seem."

"But wait!" said Chanticleer. "The dream went on.
Somehow I was here again, and one
Of the doors opened, and in came lots of men,
The kind that come to clean here now and then.
They carried cages, began to stuff us in,
While terrified, we raised an awful din
And ran this way and that, to no avail,
For soon they had us fifty in a jail
Cell built for five, so stuffed we couldn't move.

"Then onto a truck we went, a ride that proved
Alas! too short, for then they hung us high
On hooks, upside down! Oh, you would cry
To see us thus, blood rushing to the head,
Half stunned! But then the belt moved on ahead,
Into a brine that stunned us more, and then
Back out into blessed air again
Where whirring knives cut our heads off clean --
Oh, God! To be beheaded by machine!
And then we hung there while the blood dripped
out!
I tell you, I awakened with a shout!

"I could stand no more!" "Now take it easy!"
Pete said. "I can see you're getting queasy.
This also is a dream that I can read,
A simple one. Believe me, there's no need
To fear what is but dreamwork, nothing more,
Of your subconscious. That vision that you saw
Of us on hooks, necks hanging upside down,
Was just a phallic symbol. Now, don't frown!
Think about it: What was that machine
Cutting off? You act out in your dream
Your shame and guilt at what we do each day,
Making something dirty of clean play.

"It was ever thus -- society drives
One's natural desires deep inside,
Where they fester and become obsessions,
Whereas in the light their power lessens.
Read Freud -- you'll find it there all clearly writ,
Or Melville, if your taste is for crit lit.

"But for God's sakes! Come make love to me!
And then get some intensive therapy
To rid yourself of dreams like these!" "I've heard
That dreams foretell what has not yet occurred,"

Said Chanticleer. "The mind can know much
more
Than we poor chickens give it credit for."

"Hogwash!" Peter said. "Medieval rot!
Science discovered long ago there's not
One shred of truth to psychic hocus-pocus.
Now come on here and get life into focus!"

So Chanticleer put dreams out of his head,
Taking heed of what his dear friend said.
Still, just to be sure, he found a place
Between the wall and earth where he might race
In case the dream foretold, as he suspected,
The future, rather than his guilt projected.

And sure enough, a few days later, men
Came in carrying stacks of cages. Then
Stuffed the chickens in like white sardines.
So much for interpreting his dreams!
As the other chickens ran helter-skelter,
Chanticleer made for his hidden shelter.

"Wait!" Pete called. "Why are you running thus?
How do you know where they are taking us?
Perhaps we're going to a bigger barn.
What makes you think these men will do us
harm?"

"The dream! The dream!" shouted Chanticleer,
Racing faster as the men came near.
"Fool!" Pete said, scornfully. "You'll see:
All is just as it was meant to be."

Pete fell back and soon was in a cage,
A squashed but ever-optimistic sage,
While Chanticleer soon reached his little bed
And crawled right in, ducking his small head.
When the barn was empty, the men came round
To see if any stragglers might be found.

One saw the little hole beneath the wall
And stuck his hand in. "Ouch!" he said. "What
call
Had you to scratch my hand? I mean no harm
To you, my friend." And then he stretched his
arm

In deeper, with the same result. "Ouch! Ouch!
Come on! You needn't be so mean a grouch!

I bet you have a first-rate doodle do!
No rooster crows as beautifully as you!
Come on out now, show me, if you can,
That you're the finest rooster in the land!"

Chanticleer remembered how it felt
In the first part of his dream to really belt
Out cock-a-doodle-do's so mightily
The hills shook, and he longed to show what he
Could do. But then the second part of his dream
Told him things might not be as they seem.

"Come on, my dear!" the man coaxed. "Let her
rip!
I bet your lusty crow is quite a pip!
Show me! How I long to hear you crow!"
So Chanticleer released one, soft and low.
"Oh, you can do much better, I declare!"
The man said. "But not cramped, as you are there.
Get out and lift your neck up, spread your wings,
And let us know the joy each morning brings!"

Chanticleer remembered well the kick
That he had felt, and tried another lick.
But it was feeble, cramped as was his chest.
"Oh, not like that! You sound like all the rest!"
The man went on. "Now come on out of there,
And let us hear you in the open air."

So Chanticleer came out to show his stuff,
And when his head had surfaced just enough,
The man grabbed hold of him and pulled him
out.

Of my tale's end, then, have no doubt:
Within the hour, Chanticleer was food --
Not to crow, but finger-lickin' good!

THE EPILOGUE TO THE MINISTER'S TALE

"That was a merry tale!" the bartender said,
"With meaning and with pleasure plainly wed,
That we might be the better for our fun.
I never thought that you would be the one,"
He said to the minister, "to have such lust
Between two males openly discussed.
Hooray for you, then! To capture in a tale
The full blood of life, hearty, whole, and hale,

In caricature, that we might see what we
Look like puffed out beyond all subtlety.
But now" (to the doctor) "we must move on, and
so
Please tell us the very best tale that you know."