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Husbandry

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Two Poems · *Robin Behn*

HUSBANDRY

Marsupial, he says, *marsupial!*
holding it up by the terribly naked tail, proud
as if he's invented the word, or, better yet,

become it: all morning long
since he'd found it in the henhouse,
shivering, crouched near the sucked-out egg,

itself no more than egg-sized, really,
but missing, now, its own furred shell—
he'd tucked it in his shirt pocket

where it rode all morning,
bulged and shifted, rested and wrestled
like a small exterior heart.

Thus, he made the morning rounds,
feeding all the bigger, the
penned-in animals.

It was dropped, he figured. *An accident*, he figured.
And hadn't he been dropped, so?
Hadn't he seen a motherness trot off

swinging the many ones she loved better
from her swollen underbelly
like a carillon of sucking bells?

So that now he lived alone,
miles from anyone, but with so many animals
an aerial view would lead God to think

*what man lacks so much caring for
that a plethora of gentle beasts
gathered around him to soften his days*

so *home* came to mean a thick coat waiting
for him to rub his fingers through
at each and every turn: Old Max

and Young Max, the original dogs,
then Maxes to follow, herding
the dingy, uncountable sheep,

foreground to the dozens of horses, the
dozens of long almost-human jaws
where the words so hard to say

are chewed and chewed
and finally pronounced
in glistening field-fulls.

And all this, a set-up
to bait the wilder creatures
who come, like the best lovers,

when we're so consumed
with what we think is happiness
we forget to watch for them;

who come, nonetheless,
to visit us domestics, us
more married animals, to sink,

if they can,
their long teeth like thoughts
into the husbanded eggs

and suck out their rightful place in the grand plan
—egg to egg to egg—by which
we believe we might circumvent

(by the planned brood,
the selling off, the day
to drive the mares to stud)

whatever loneliness
too many or too few
creatures makes for.

They come, the uninvited, the wild,
the still-too-young, out of their wild
pockets in the woods, into

the farm, just
visiting—like him, like all
the planned-for creatures—just

visiting the farm, visiting
the planet, the particular pocket
of sun's warmth that nests,

for now, among the other stars
like galaxy's *g*: at home
for the moment

language lasts, then off to another word:
good, as in the boy he'd always been, or
gimme, as in, well, now he's unsure

quite *how* to ask for his opossum back,
since he's lowered it
—his whole cupped hand into my

whole cupped hand into which
its little long-nailed feet (birds', maybe?)
dig, a bit—but he's done

displaying his year's best find.
Done with the show-and-tell he drove to town for.
He snatches, tail-dangles it up like a crazy watch

and we, little pocket of fellow-humans gathered, we
watch as it goes
back into his pocket (too late, now, *not* to picture

its little dimple already forming, too late *not* to think:
pocket in a pocket in a pocket)
as he drops himself back

into the old paid-off pick-up's cabin
that seems to have borne them, and that bears them
safely home.