

## A Covid Calendar, in Twelve Animals

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January            I am not paying attention, not looking around much.

I once saw a gestation crate and thought This is the End of the World.

We used to set up at the mall – tour all the malls with a pink papier-mâché sow, until we were banned from them, thwarted by Manitoba Pork.

We started in 2003, I think. Endeavoring to end caging by 2013, then 2017....

‘We lost,’ I said. ‘Yes,’ she said.

She used to ask me to chicken-sit when she went undercover.

The hens liked to greet me at the front door, along with the note that willed me everything, should some psycho lose his temper, kill her for seeing what Canada keeps secret. ‘What if I don’t want two house-chickens and six cats,’ I’d think.

I book a flight to Italy.

- February      Something about a lung-eating virus on the other side of the world, as if the earth splits neatly into two. My sister is in lockdown in Naples. One man records the obituaries, counting the newspaper pages as he turns them: *uno, due, tre, quattro, cinque, sei...*  
His dog watches him.
- March          Hitching a ride to work, hunkered down in the back seat as CBC radio plays: something about a bat, this time. What a crock, I say – the old story about bats, and bat-eaters, and the East.  
Because there's a harder one to swallow, about China turning Westward, which is to say run by corporate meat and secrecy. Wuhan is the fourth-largest pork-producing province.
- April          'Due to COVID, Canada to shrink flock by 12%' a headline announces.  
[Canada ~~to shrink~~ to kill ~~flock~~ caged hens ~~by 12%~~ in the millions and millions.]
- May            Visit afflicted chickens spared. You think you'll be prepared because you've heard all about it but it's different up close. Plumage ravaged, insides out.  
'You could not see to the end in the darkness,' one rescuer says. She is precise with her numbers: 2268 hens ready for rehoming.

June

Regan Russell.

As she performed the sacrament of extreme unction for the pigs – offering water, saying goodbye – her hair’s bright silver blazed like a halo, if you think in similes like that, and a seagull screamed nearby. Everyone saw what happened, what the Ontario police won’t release, what the slaughterhouse cameras caught on film. (Don’t tell me don’t tell me don’t tell me don’t tell me. We are sitting outside, the sun makes the pool water sparkle, three goats run by, and she says, ‘The truck accelerated, tore Regan’s body completely in half.’)

July, August,

September

A summer enduring 45 calling it the KungFlu or the ChinaVirus.

‘Why is it that the head of state (the *chef d’état*) must also be an eater of flesh?’ a philosopher asks.

‘Why doesn’t he tell us the name of the cat who follows him into the bathroom?’ my students want to know.

Because to do so would be to start up the whole Genesis thing again – the one about a man naming and a woman colluding with a snake and the human crowning itself.

There’s talk in the news of pangolins but never pigs.

October

If you retreat into daydreams then you can think more clearly. ‘Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death,’ says Ishmael gazing upon a whale. ‘Methinks what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance.’

November 17 million is so many killed minks. They're hastily buried (near a fresh-water source, taking the fish down with them), only to rise from the dead, decaying into the lightness of nitrogen and phosphorus, elemental exhaustion and haze. Zombie minks, someone jokes.

Goddamn these Danes – one minute they're Vikings, the next they're piling animals into a mass grave. Canada, of course, follows suit, but the outbreak isn't reported until December.

December The Canada West Swine Health Intelligence Network (CWSHIN, for short) anxiously notes that Covid-19 is exposing their shit (literally) to the public. 'Swine acute diarrhea virus is a coronavirus ... but we're not talking about a spread among people ... but it reaches the media and causes some discussion.' The CWSHIN advises that the public not pay attention to the 'media hype'.

The origins of horror in caged-animal agriculture covered over, not by chance but by careful calculation.

The calendar year closes. The word derives from *calare*, meaning to announce solemnly, to call out, as the Roman priests did when they shouted out the appearance of the moon each month. Or from *calendarium*, referring to Roman account books and the monthly settling of debts.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This poem is dedicated to Twyla Francois, trained undercover farm-animal activist and artist; to Jessica Walker and Colleen Walker, who rescued almost 3000 hens through their sanctuary, the Little Red Barn, in Winnipeg, Manitoba; and to Regan Russell, the activist with Toronto Animal Save who was killed by a man who struck her with his transport truck on the grounds of a slaughterhouse. Her death is reported here:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/regan-russell-1.5627216>