

## Free Range Verse

*J.A. Cooper*

Did they notice I opened the gate?

Open. Freedom

Still magnetised by scraps

and bits of grain

they bide their time – a pretence of contentment and control

Autonomy

Who will notice first?

Who will be wisest today?

Pecking, scraping, fussing

Automatically

Nearer to the gate now

a surreptitious manoeuvre under a cloak

of dust kicked up

by bustling busybodies

Brown Hen – will she be leader?

Out then in

as if to prove a point

*I come and go as I please*

Little bantams – pint-sized pundits

Followers. Not leaders

Puffed up Red Hen pretends to leave

Out then in

as if with a purpose

*Now where did I lose my mind?*

Dumb consensus dictates

they will depart: *en masse*

Poultry in motion now  
a fidget of hens patrolling  
in an ever-widening arc  
Yet always returning  
Out then in  
Returning

Now they're off – jogging  
Half recollected feasts beneath the mulberry  
exercise an irresistible drive  
And they're off!

Black Bantam pauses – stares  
She alone seeks solitude  
How Human!  
But a sitting duck for foxes

*Will you be here at bedtime?*

Yes, I'll be here.

You'll be back and I'll be here – at sundown

*You'd better be here*

Yes. I'll be here when you get back

To lock you up and tuck you in – come sundown

Free, to roost in peace

Contained, at last.