

ALICE WALKER

Mothers' Day
May 9, 2004

Dear Mr. Novak:

Suppose in a future life you come back as a chicken. You are small and fuzzy and scared. You are soft. Beautiful. Yellow, with bright orange legs. Tiny feet. Innocent, deeply curious eyes.

You are in a place that does not live up to you. It is dark and hot; there is no fresh air. It stinks. As soon as you are born, part of your mouth, your tender beak, is burned off. This indescribable pain is your introduction to life.

It will be a short life.

Each day "managed" by hands and machines you can barely glimpse and comprehend not at all. You are in a cage with so many others! You feel your body, stuffed with food and hormones, pressing against the bodies around you. It reminds you perhaps of the lifetime ago when you were a human slave in a ship enduring the Middle Passage.

You feel heavy and hot, suffocating, because you are constantly drugged; your body forced to grow so large and fast your bones cannot support it: they begin to break.

After an infinity of unbearable pain you are lifted out of the cage into which you were born, and from which your mother was taken immediately after your birth, and dumped, with thousands of others, into a vat of boiling water. Most of the others are dead, but for some reason, you are not. You drown, choking, in the smelly, scalding water.

You have not had one moment in which to touch earth, to see the sky, to enjoy a worm; you have had no chance to experience a mother's love, to receive the rich comfort of hearing a father's cocky crow, or to feel the kind hand on your feathers of a caring human being.

Your body, broken though it is, and smeared with the excrement that left it because you were so afraid as you died, is plucked of its sickly covering of feathers, cut up, and sent to the place where it will be covered with white flour and herbs, fried in hot fat, and presented to human families who have no way of knowing they are eating – bringing into their own bodies (and spirits) – the deep suffering, fear and misery of your largely un-lived life.

I do not wish this for you. I do not wish it for myself. I do not wish it for the thousands that eat at Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC).

We do not know what Life has in mind for us, or how many lifetimes we are going to have. Understanding this, it is wise, I believe, to avoid acts of cruelty and violence and to put our trust and effort into consideration of all "others" with whom we share the planet; as we extend, uphold and honor all acts of universal kindness.

With an embrace
for you
& deep hopes for health
and happiness
to your
family.

In peace,
Alice Walker