

## The Rooster Man

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Poetry

The dark surrounds the well-worn track  
through bracken, thicket, razorback,  
the thorn cuts through and tears the skin  
of child tormented from within.  
ne'er feels the wounds just surface deep,  
more important just to keep  
on moving through that pathway bare  
to safety from the rooster's lair.  
to eiderdown and crisp white sheets  
now oozing blood, heart's racing beat,  
the dark enfolds, her eyelids blink,  
and muddy feet on feathers sink.  
sneak out again as daylight breaks,  
back to the house where mother waits.  
only to repeat once more,  
when father can't get through the door.

a piece of string with door key  
'round her neck was worn.  
her slippers never saved her  
from the rooster's scorn.

the old, gnarled jacaranda  
provides memories innate  
its branches cascade over  
the worn palings of the gate.  
above, the childhood treehouse  
its floor with grey boards worn  
solace from the danger  
of the rooster's scorn.  
the little gate an entry  
to the refuge, now rejects  
with rusty lock and hinges  
stiff with decades of neglect.  
the weeds and vines entrap her  
a barrier inane  
why can't she just get through there  
to be safe and held again  
in the arms of her loved neighbours  
her protectors in the lane  
who kept their back door open  
through the dark nights and the rain.

in the darkness of the night,  
the cockerel lost his final round  
left wondering, as we always will,  
what slayed the bird,  
his feathers strewn with blood,  
a fall from grace, a blow, a kill.  
did his body make a thud?  
was death preceded by a fight?  
what was the final awful sound?  
dead as only dead can be,  
the body swollen, tongue engorged and dry,  
yet six more days in lifeless purgatory,  
can one presume to ask the question, why?  
what preceded his demise?  
what did he do or say, to snap the final straw?  
what tipped it over, more threats and lies,  
the rooster spread recumbent on the floor.  
left to lie 'til sunrise,  
brought reality to roost,  
the chickens in a panic, sanity reduced,  
the single act, calamity, on the chook yard floor.  
then, with the body carried off,  
life was calm once more.