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STORIES FROM SUBURBAN ROAD

Adapted by Alan Becher

EXTRACT

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STORIES FROM SUBURBAN ROAD

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CHARACTERS

TOM

RUDOLPH

GOANNA

MUM

MICKEY

ERNIE

NEW KID

PROFESSOR MURDOCH

PEG

MRS MOODIE

NEW GIRL

DAD

KEEPER HOPE

ALLY BREEN

MR TRAYNOR

LAL

SISTER GERVAISE

Also musicians (ukelele, spoons, didgeridoo), sound effects, narrators, children, blokes, animals and others.

The play covers events in South Perth from 1923 – 1932

The Ensemble Theatre production had the following cast:

TOM (in order of appearance)

Kim De Lury	KING BANTAM
Toni Pearen	OLD ALLY BREEN WENT TO SEE THE QUEEN
Craig Williams	OH MR GALLAGHER, OH MR SHEEN
Kate Mulvany	THE NEW KID AND THE RACEHORSE GOANNA
Michelle Doake	OF BIDDY AND MY DAD
Kim De Lury	DOWN COMO
Rohan Nichol	PROFESSOR MURDOCH AND THE OLD WHITE WAY

Kim De Lury	Rudolph/Goanna/Harmonica/Ukelele
Michelle Doake	Mum
Craig Williams	Mickey/Ernie/NewKid/ Professor Murdoch/Ukelele/Spoons
Kate Mulvany	Peg/Mrs Moodie/New Girl
Rohan Nichol	Dad/Keeper Hope/Ally Breen/Mr Traynor/Ukelele/Didgeridoo
Toni Pearen	Lal/Sister Gervaise/Ukelele

ACT ONE

The actors mingle with the audience as they enter the auditorium. When the audience is seated, Tom, centre stage, whistles loudly as a signal to gather the kids together around the bantam. The kids rush onto the stage yelling and form a circle around Tom. Once the image is established, each kid turns from the circle to address the audience.

KING BANTAM

- 1st KID I think she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.
- 2nd KID Every rich amber feather was flecked at the end with
chocolaty brown.
- 3rd KID Her shining russet hood covered her neck as far as her
shoulders.
- 4th KID And her proud little black tail shimmered peacock-green every
time she moved.
- 5th KID Half-a-dozen times on the way back from Ian's place I stopped
and lifted the lid of the shoe-box to stare raptly at my ...
- KIDS Beautiful bantam hen!
- TOM She had one small defect. Her head was completely covered
with a hard, glistening helmet of stick-fast fleas.
- KIDS Ugh!
- TOM I comforted myself that my mother ...

KIDS WHO KNEW EVERYTHING!

TOM Would know what to do with the fleas. Before reaching home I stopped for the last time and pretended to myself that the hen had somehow got away, just to make even more tremendous the wonder of finding her still there when I lifted the lid, sitting so still and so dignified. 'Tuck! Tuck!' Without so much as moving her head, she turned one bright eye up to me and replied 'Tuck! Tuck!' She had messed in the straw but that didn't matter. When I got home I would put her in the old cage the cocky had lived in.

I had so longed for a bantam that I had even prayed for it. Every night I rattled off a ragbag of prayers and I always tacked on every 'Oh Sacred Heart of Jesus I place my Trust in Thee!' I could manage, gabbling as many as ten of them in ten seconds —

KIDS Oh Sacred Heart of Jesus I place my trust in thee ...(x5)

TOM I had been told at school that every time I said one it meant 300 days off my sentence to Purgatory.

KIDS Oh Sacred Heart of Jesus I place my trust in thee ...

TOM One night, having won myself a sizeable reprieve, I tacked on as an afterthought, 'And please, God, let me have a bantam.'

KIDS Please!

TOM Of course you weren't supposed to ask for things for yourself. You prayed for others, and others prayed for you. I made a permanent feature of my new prayer, and I got my reward.

TOM (*cont*) Two weeks after I began the prayer, I stared at her entranced, but already with the ghost of a worry rattling its chains at the back of my mind.

You could never really quite know how my mother was going to take things ...

MOTHER Especially animals.

TOM She roared blue murder when I brought home the possum from a bird's-nesting expedition ... but in no time at all she had simmered down and was cutting up carrots for it.

Then I brought home my first pigeon, a lovely Blue Bar ... and all she did was to make a rule that I was –

MOTHER Never to bring home a cock bird!

TOM When, inevitably, I brought home a cock bird she made a rule that ...

MOTHER All the eggs must be broken.

TOM She forgot about it after a while, as I had known she would, and now there were forty or more Blue Bars picking up a living, arrowing the yard.

There was only one way to find out what Mother would do about the bantam. I walked tentatively into the kitchen by the back door. My sisters were doing their music theory and my mother was preparing ...

MOTHER Stuffed lamb flaps for tea.

TOM Where's Mickey?

MOTHER He's gone down to the zoo. He's helping with the ponies.

TOM My brother was a school friend of the sons of Colonel Le Soeuf, who ran the zoo. Saturday afternoons there were penny rides on the beautiful little Shetland ponies, and often my brother was allowed to lead. It was just something else he had, like his cricket bat and his football boots and his model yacht, and going away to Kalgoorlie at Christmas with the Young Australia League.

MICKEY And being older.

MOTHER He's not coming home to dinner. What have you got in that box?

TOM This was the moment. A banty ... Ian gave it to me.

MOTHER Oh? He did, did he? Good Lord! It's covered with stickfast fleas! Look! Did you know?

TOM Yes, Mum.

MOTHER No wonder he gave it to you. The nerve. You can take it right back to Mr Ian with my compliments.

TOM Oh, no, Mum! PLEASE!

SISTERS Oh no, Mum! She's beautiful!

TOM I thought you'd be able to fix the fleas up, Mum, I said, cunningly.

MOTHER Did you, now! Well. Tuck, Tuck!

BANTAM Tuck, tuck!

MOTHER I don't suppose another mouth'll break us. Peg, get the dripping bowl out of the cooler. Lal, get the kerosene bottle. It's under the sink. You get me a little tin of some sort. Well? Skedaddle!

TOM When everything was assembled, she put a dab of dripping in the tin, poured a few drops of kerosene on it, and mixed it around with her finger. Then she took the hen from the box, set it gently on her lap, and smeared its head with the mixture.

MOTHER There you are, banty. That'll do 'til the doctor sees you. What are you going to feed her on?

TOM I thought she could have some of Ginger's chaff.

MOTHER Ginger's chaff! What in the name of God do they teach you at school these days? Here. Your picture money for next Saturday night, don't forget. Duck over to Mr Faddy's and get sixpennyworth of wheat. And don't drag your feet. Two shakes of a dead lamb's tail and I'll be dishing up!

TOM That night, the wonder of my prayer and the way it had been answered had become too much for me to keep it to myself. I had to share it. My mother was sitting in the living room, doing what she called ...

MOTHER Fiddling the books.

TOM Mum ...

MOTHER What is it? You're supposed to be in bed, Tommy-Dodd. Up early tomorrow.

TOM I've got a secret.

MOTHER Have you now. What is it?

TOM I asked ... It was going to be harder than I thought. I asked God to give me a banty. A long time ago. And he did!

MOTHER Glory be to Holy Saint Denis, so we've got a blessed saint in the family! Tell you what. You get down on your hunkers and ask him to let us win the Charities or we'll soon be in Queer Street. You should be asleep by now, not worrying about God.

TOM Once more between my sheets I lay thinking. The Charities I knew about. A sort of big raffle with a lot of money for first prize. But – Queer Street? I worried at it ...

CHORUS Coode Street, Angelo Street, Mends Street, River Street, Lawler Street, Preston Street, Forrest Street.

TOM Trying to remember some street in South Perth called Queer...

BANTAM Tuck, tuck.

TOM Gradually, my consciousness change to the shape of the bantam and my whole mind became a reflection of the little brown hen in her cage up in Ginger's stable. Whatever happens, I've got the banty!

MICKEY Tommy!

TOM On the second Saturday after she had joined the family, my brother, Mickey, beckoned me into the chaff-shed ...

MICKEY Look behind the tea chest. See what you'll find.

TOM In a little hollow in the sand there were four eggs, exquisite golden brown. The banty's?

MICKEY Uh, huh.

TOM When'll there be chickens?

MICKEY Don't be dopey. You've got to have a rooster first. You've got a father haven't you? Well?

Biddy the cow is heard mooing.

Look up now, I've got to feed Biddy.

TOM I stood staring at the four eggs. A rooster ... of course. It was the pigeons all over again. A bantam rooster. I knew where there were plenty of them but it would take some planning to get my hands on one. The back fence of the Perth Zoo was about a mile or so from our home in what we called 'the other end' – the posh part of the suburb.

PEG I see a poppy-show all made of calico!

LAL All clean and well paid for!

TOM I'm going somewhere. You two go somewhere else.

PEG We can't. We've all got to go home together. Mum said.

TOM Just tell Mum we got separated or something. I'm not hanging around all the time with you.

LAL I'll tell Mum you ran off and left us.

TOM Alice was always the first to resort to tattling. You do and I'll tell Mum you climbed the fence! You had to fight fire with fire.

I knew exactly where I was going. I could have got there in a few minutes except that for my purpose there were still far too many people wandering the gravel paths.

I detoured to visit the big tree where the peacocks roosted after dark, and picked up a fistful of long, lovely tail feathers.

At the kiosk I spent a penny on four of the lolly balls that change colour as you suck them.

In front of the bandstand I stood listening to the music of the RSL band.

The RSL band forms up and plays. Kids sit in front of them sucking lemons.

And watching the children in the front row sucking lemons. All the children I knew believed that it would make the bandsmen blow spit into the trumpets.

The kids laugh.