

# Robyn Rowland

## *Dismantling*

He uses an old broom handle to push  
the bird-net from on top, leaning over  
the high deck rail so both our breaths catch.  
Anger pumps in me below at his unwillingness  
to hand over. I think, *crazy way to go, falling*

*into his fig tree at one hundred years of age,*  
but he balances, a tightrope walker.  
He's thinking of the next recipe he's stuffed  
above the fridge, the old glass jars rippling  
in the cupboard, waiting for the jam he loves.

Back in my childhood home now as his carer,  
I fume frustrated at the sieve of windows,  
jammed frames, leaking taps.  
Now this disassembling, for winter,  
for next summer when he hopes for fruit.

Four metres tall, once green and strong,  
this fat-leafed tree that gave good service  
is blocking the sea view from my window.  
Pruning will cut it back. But how long I  
will need this old horizon, I cannot tell.

Untangling the frame from below,  
metal and wood he'd wired together  
for its support, rusts my hands,  
cuts my leg scraping it open, blood  
all bright and fierce. Grief's sting.

I cast the bits aside surprised at my anger,  
wrench clear the broken poles.  
Unable to undo the corrode of screws,  
I smash it again and again with a mattock,  
that other foreseen loss battering inside.

Trimming for new growth, I find the tree is  
a roulade, hidden tunnels in the branches,  
in its thick trunk. Inside, fat white borers  
a finger long, nestle, gloating. Defeat  
is etched in me. The tree itself must go.

But chopping away its damaged limbs,  
I find a cleft under the dead leaves  
holding for him, the final fruit I  
raise toward him, hopeful, one bird-torn,  
one perfect – the two last purple figs.