

A Riderless Horse

Tim Upperton



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AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

First published 2022
Auckland University Press
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
New Zealand
www.aucklanduniversitypress.co.nz

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ISBN 978 1 86940 977 7



**Earle Creativity and Development Trust
in Manawatū and Rangitikei**

A catalogue record for this book is available from
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Book and cover design by Duncan Munro

This book was printed on FSC® certified paper
Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

For Oscar, Tess, Ben and Katrina

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My childhood

I was Dick. I teased Anne and George.
I was Edmund, betrayed my friends
for a sweet. Something rotten in me.
Cast out, castaway. For long years
I had an island to myself.
I lived on corn, goat meat, fish. All changed
by a single footprint in the sand.
I harkened to the call of the wild.
The trees cracked in the cold.
How lost, how alone I was. I howled.
I hunted. I ate. My bloodied muzzle.
I left that place and took rooms
in foggy London. I solved the case
of the speckled band. Then I split in two.
I avoided mirrors. My other self
was murderous, but I grew kinder.
In the end I lost everything.
Take my eyes, I said to a swallow.
He flew with them across the city.

YRROS

You had done a bad thing.
You knew you had to apologise.

I, who have done bad things
always and had to apologise

for another and yet another, said,
You must say sorry.

Long ago, after another said,
You must say sorry,

I said, No.
But I knew I had to.

You knew you couldn't say, No.
You knew you had to

say sorry, but you said it backwards.
You bore your apology like a cross,

defiantly. Said backwards
it became a sound an ocean bird, an albatross,

might make, a lonely cry above
the murmuring sea.

I heard a word in your cry, above
the murmuring sea,

a word not said rightly,
a word I should know.

The wrong life cannot be lived rightly.
I should know.

There is time and time to apologise.
Still, ahead of you, the bad thing.