

The countryside can be cruel. Life and death intermingle. They cross paths and leave only faeces and decay behind.

Accustomed to the smell of shit and death there was nothing in my life that had prepared me for the smell emanating from the two concrete and corrugated sheds. No sound.

No humans.

No signs of life.

Just this eye watering, nostril burning stench.

The sheds were the talk of the village. Recently erected on a spit of land hemmed in by single track roads on what had been an island of green. They lay to the north, a five minute walk from the village shop.

In red gumboots we trudged past the lure of bubble-gum and sherbet dib dabs. Hand held tight in its black and white Sooty and Sweep mitten. My octogenarian Nanny spurring us on with tales of wonder.

Chickens.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of chickens.

I loved the chickens who lived at the bottom of the garden. Bossy, self-important beings who pecked, scraped and squawked. Comically appearing to pick up their feathered pantaloons while running at speed to the clank of the feed bucket. Always busy.

Always gossiping.

Always pleased to see me.

The joy of holding a freshly laid egg in the palm of your hand, it is momentous.

Warm to the touch, a perfect oval sculpture with a flecked, creamy white matt finish. Magical gifts that I would rush to the kitchen on a bed of straw. Skinny legs pumping to show off my haul.

So where were they?

Where were the chickens?

Surely not inside those concrete bungalows. What could possibly live in a building with no windows? How could anything live in there, certainly not chickens.

And what was the stench? Dear God what could make a smell like that?

Not long after the fateful trip to the chicken farm a fox made a trip to our hen house. Scattered bodies, blood and feathers everywhere. Carnage. One chicken taken. All dead.