

Featured Poet



Liz Hall-Downs

(Australia)

Place: of Invisibility

overhearing yourself described as
that woman with the limp, that gimp,
that woman whose difference
is kept full frontal, it's
enough to make you never
leave the house

on the welfare side of illness
my friend jen, (eleven years of pain
and counting) writes of how
you only see the 'poor kiddies'
on tv, not the 'middle-aged women
with their colostomies...'

while down in rural victoria this winter
another battles the cold to fuel
the generator. three strokes,
and counting, she rages at the elements.
there are dogs to be fed, roofs
to be hammered, didn't want me
to worry, she said, so never told
that she fell over the heater, fell
headlong into her own strong
conscience, crawled to bed, put
the morphine patch on
and went on writing on her laptop
elegies to a dead son

these lonely women
these everyday heroines
locked up in row upon row
of boxlike houses with curtains

these women, invisible
soldiers in the war against death
braving to switch on the television
to see the newest tabloid miracle
that never makes the journey
to their corner pharmacies

these women
stand behind you
in the supermarket queue
hands full of teabags
eyes full of suicide

you rarely notice them
as you step outside.

Place: of Beauty ('Euphoria' 2002)

I.

king parrot winged green and blue
and red of head, sitting
in the stringybark, calling
in his flock
he is master of colour
king of tweet, lord of song,
a bright flash of brilliance
in the morning sun.

II.

frogmouth, sleeping in the grey
crook of casuarinas
wakes on dark and stalks
the bird feeder
for small rats and marsupials
-antechinus, melomys,
or feather tailed glider
flown down for a feast.
frogmouth, ancient nightjar
whose grey and brown stripes
hide against rough bark
whose nocturnal life creates
scream and squawk
predator of dark, glowing eyes
in my torchlight, bless this place
with your presence
this still spring night.

III.

blue wren, the most
promiscuous of birds,
with twitching tail
and cheeks of sky
sits in the center of his harem
of industrious brown girls
who come and go
with sticks and burrs
to build in crazy lantana
a nest for spring's harvest
of bright baby birds.

IV.

she comes mornings
-red-necked wallaby,
her pouch full of joey-
to feed on shoots of bladey grass,
seeds of barbed wire
and kangaroo grass,
hops down to waterhole
black tips of ears twitching
paws positioned for hiding
that small one she carries.

but as she bends down to drink
a wayward head is emerging
for this day is too sunlit
for such cautiousness
joey leaps out to test
his wobbly legs, independence.