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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

EUCALYPTUS, RAZOR WIRE: JOHANNESBURG 1990

Marcelle Freiman

EUCALYPTUS

Sensing her precariousness
perched on the edge of the planet
the naked island-continent stoically
revealed her hand –
a myriad silver eucalyptus trees
their red-stemmed red-rimmed leaves
a pointillist monotony.

In the flush of summer
they strip off their clothing
make statements of ochre and soft pink,
crusty brown and velvet grey.
Their hanging flower brushes
transient of pink, yellow and palest green
and sturdy sticky seeds that fall
dare the stones to let them grow
into huge knotted giants
or grey stringy-barked creatures
with fibrous weathered skin.

Family Myrtaceae fringes the land
by a sea of white-rimmed kingfisher blue,
with first inhabitants
they grasp the salt-sand
witness of bloodprints
and backdrop of legends
they slide unconsciously as dreams
and reaching always for the sun
they balance.

RAZOR WIRE: JOHANNESBURG 1990

They're penning the hostels with razor wire –
and he walks it like a tightrope
his large palmed hand
cradles a heavy 'panga'
its clean-sharpened blade
held parallel and alert.

There is no other place for him –
but this tightened wire of theirs
that divides inside from out
their space from his.

But no fence will enclose a human soul
whose gall exhausted runs
into crevices between grains of sand...

Wire unravels, a spring released,
uncoils in silver shards
jagged bright as lightning
it aims with the sureness of steel
unbarbed coiling over the land
a net of metal with arms to the sky
like a thousand buckled railway-lines.

The five o'clock train draws slowly
from Jeppe Station to Soweto.
The panga cuts random through the dusk,
targets flesh that freezes
bloodless with shock
as the blade hacks and beats
people thrown out like sacks of grain
while the stones between the railway-lines
grind themselves together and weep.

Stars look down from the roof of sky.
The night turns to another scarred day.
At the hostel in the morning
the palm that held the handle
cradles like a melon
the head of a beaten brother...

the wire that held his sinews taut
snaps as if oiled by tears
for one on whom revenge
has played its turn –
and it is hard to tell
whether it was them
or it was them...

Mark Mahemoff

GREG

A body was found drifting in the Parramatta River.
Its face was wrinkled, swollen white,
chewed to anonymity by fish.
That wasn't written in the newspaper
but you can imagine it.

I'd known him for some months
and had been drawn into a friendship
by the quiet way he went about his business
in the sheltered workshop.
He managed his psychosis
like a loaded semi-trailer
on a steep mountain road.

While his body was being sliced and probed for answers
I was telling his girlfriend the news.
She cried with the honesty of someone
who hadn't had a chance to say goodbye.
We sat in mute grief
knowing that's all we could do.