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Poems

betsy struthers

In a Toowong Garden

The frangipani and jacaranda trees
leafless in August
still hold the promise of fragrance
in their names
the syllables softly pliant
on my tongue.
Begonia, coleus, wild orchids
run riot along the fence;
from the split hands of the palm
bananas droop
their thick curves green and inviting.
Under the early alien stars
fruit bats glide
their spiked wings
wide as my armspan;
I look for comfort in shadows
your face my familiar.
I finger the lines
of our living together,
the map of our travelling to this place
trapped in the hollows
of your shuttered eyes.
My lips follow, urgent
with silenced words
as if a kiss
excused all distance,
as if a kiss
meant talking.

Neighbours

The noises the neighbours make
cross the two feet of space
between thin wooden walls
of Brisbane houses.

We listen to their coughs,
their stifled moans.

The toilet flushes once
and then again.

Their fights invade us:
you're no man
she shrieks until
he hits her.

On the other side,
the telly's always on,
tuned loud because he's deaf
and she plays hymns
on her electric organ.

They go to sleep at nine.
The long evenings
of silence in this house
oppress us.

I don't have to strain
to hear your lips purse
as you reread your mail
from home. My own voice
chokes on shopping lists
and travel plans.

I'm learning a new language
from the crested cockatoos
appropriate to this place,
not wholly human
and not quite a scream.