

EVEN
IN
THE
DARK

ROSE
LUCAS



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For Pauline, Zoe and Eva

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1. Heatwave

Heat Wave, Melbourne

A ring-tail possum,
driven from its parched and dusty trees,
staggers into our garden,
 desperate for water,
and dies on our path;
her young,
still alive in the pouch,
squirm and cling
to the dead fur,
to each other,
their tiny marsupial eyes
 closed
to the scorch of relentless
sun.

Meanwhile,
a man,
his mind
 slamming
stops his car at the top of the bridge –
 commuter traffic is thick around him –
he unbuckles his small child
from the back seat
and takes her
 (the smell, the safety of a father's arms)
into the glare –
 her crisp new school dress
crumpling
 in the sweat of his hands,

and
then
in the rush
hot
as she falls
through sky and
slick of water –

even in the early morning,
the heat is metallic,
it glitters
in the blue dome of air,
rising from the baked
bricks and asphalt of the city and
swinging,
hooked and
heavy:

hot grit blows across the day's
raw
unlidded eye.

Rays

In lapping shallows by the pier at Inverloch
three broad shapes sweep and glimmer,
 slicing through the shadowy muck,
waiting for morsels;

barbed tails flicking,
hooded eyes black and
alert while
the soft, secret slits of mouths
skim the sand,
catching at slowly sinking guttings,
the evening's easy pickings:

fishermen lean – philosophical – on the railing,
jumpered and japara'd against the chill of seeping night and
the prospect of long hours
standing still,
of baiting up and filling the bucket
with the jump, the silver flash of fish;
one shines a torch
into the darkening heaves of salty water –

and, like creatures in a dream
the rays come again from
nowhere into
the wavering spill of greeny light,
passing near and over one another,
their black wing tips arced,
graceful and
quiet,
cleaving the water like a dancer's hands –

Lavender

The creamy hum
 of bees
 swims through
the field's indigo haze;
a cloud of
air,
nectared and sharp, it
hovers and
darts
in the intense drowsiness of the day:

I am languid in the sun;
I want to gather up these warm sheaves
like a swaddled baby,
and sleep in the shade of a tree –
there we will grow,
 slowly,
 yearning together like the
feathered twining of
roots,
deep and pungent,
dreaming of the bleached
 light of the day;

far above,
in the flickery light,
scythes swing
steadily
through the blue heat –

and sweetness brims and
spills
into a harvest of wicker baskets,
a fugue of
deepest purples and greens.

Country Swimming Pool

All round the crackling
 dryness of the fields –
 their patient wheels
of hay, the leaves that
 flicker
 green, and blue, silver
 then grey,
a vaporous whispering in the hot
currents of north country air.

Swelter: the
 chk chk chk
of bore water sprinklers;

Beside the hopeful brightness of
this cool, blue rectangle
I lie on the grassy slope
breathing
on my damp towel, and
feel the curve of earth,
 its heavy flanks,
 the loamy darkness of the soil
drawing me down –

skin stretches over bones of
 hip and pelvis,
 turning
my belly slides and speaks to
blades of buffalo grass,
the obscured sphere of ant and beetle;
and the watery case of my body
 shivers,
 disassembling
in the long blast of afternoon heat.

Mallee Country

Beneath

 vast coils of blue,
this aching stretch of fields –

grey scrub, or the vivid
green of crop sheared with

a channel's edge,
 its concrete lips,
its whispering gleam of clarity;

cleft in the crease of curling wind
and smell of soil, and cows,

the river's long brown body snakes
from branch and root and fallen trunk
through rim of red gums,
 gracious in a winter sun –

in the breadth of this country
it is possible
to pay attention to
 the humming of the air,
to trail fingers through the
 quiet and slippery currents
of a coursing, hidden day.

Autumn Pelican

It's the lift of the heart that follows
the dip of the wing,
as gulls skim the
soft skin of the sea,
 silver gulls glinting in the grey mist, and
 the greater wing span of the young pacific gull,
 finding the break, the morning's
 catch –
it's the heart that rides the warm road of the thermal
high, with the pelican
 gliding –
deep in thought,
turning slightly in the uncertain light,
 this way, and
that,
feeling the diaphanous spray,
 sweet with breeze and saltiness
stroke the flank of these glistening feathers,
the heart's wild transport.

Leavings

Heading south
fruit bats slip like swimmers
through fading light –
first one
or two, then several
leave their daytime roosts in the city gardens
until wave after wave
rolls out in balmy air;
small and elegant,
the dark triangulated shapes of their webbed wings
are back-lit
for a moment by dipping sun –
before they fan out,
hungry,
across the darkening prospects of roofs and gardens and
the rising hum and click of night time heat:

at least one, veering west, will find its way into our back yard
and move, privately, amongst the broad and generous leaves of
the fig tree;
in the morning we see how much we have shared –
the ripe, ruby fruits torn open on the ground,
leavings of the midnight's feast.