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## ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

### Quilting Bees

I've turned up my nose at them.  
Not just since the neighbour  
who stole my first husband

or, revising history a bit,  
the neighbour to whom I  
relegated him, even with gratitude—

not just because  
the Other Woman  
took up quilting—

with luck she got tangled in rags,  
threads frazzled, pins scattered,  
lost needles forever a threat

and her cobwebs still ensnare  
cotton batting, goose down, unseemly  
clues to unravelled afternoons—

I've shunned quilts  
as women's work.  
I was out to write like a man.

Today in a Tasmanian garden  
I hang the guest-bed quilt  
over two chairs to air not

because it needs refreshing but  
the sun is out, I've washed the sheets,  
and I procrastinate on facing the page:

the need to invent, piece together  
ungainly incidents, unruly characters  
ripped from impossible lives, or mine—

This quilt is signed: "Jill."  
One side is white with minute florets  
ivory, baby blue, and pink.

Reverse: glistening yellow ribbons,  
gleaming green, navy, mottled orange,  
a few huge open roses.

Borders grey and black  
frame rectangles and squares  
sewn side to side to side ...

How many months must this Jill  
have spent locked in her tower  
turning her wheel,

patching fragments of fabric,  
re-threading tiny eyes,  
pricking her thumbs.

A store-bought blanket  
would keep me as warm.  
Yet I am caught in the craft

of an artist who fashioned  
patterns from tatters,  
unwinding spools

and scraps of color,  
her stitches, seams  
and petty thefts invisible.

*Elisavietta Ritchie's poetry collections include The Arc of the Storm, Elegy for the Other Woman, Wild Garlic, Raking the Snow, and Tightening the Circle Over Eel County. After five years in Canada, she is in Australia this year.*