



#WhatWENeed

Declarations

By Ailsa Rayner

They speak our rights in conference halls,
in glossy reports, in earnest tones —
Australia the champion,
Australia the fair,
Australia the signatory that nods
toward Geneva while stepping back at home.

The UNCRPD is cited like scripture,
a liturgy of dignity, autonomy,
equality before the law.

A hymn sung loudly —
but only in the key of aspiration.

Yet in the fine print,
in those interpretive declarations
that hover like disclaimers in the margins,
our freedom is footnoted.

Our personhood is conditional.

Our consent is optional.

Our equality — “subject to”.

They tell the world that rights matter here.

They tell us that the system is “balanced”,

that protections are “appropriate”,
that the old powers must remain
because of who we are
(or who they fear we might be).

So we live in the gap
between what is promised
and what is permitted.

We know the space well —
the shadowed corridor
between the language of liberty
and the machinery of substitution,
the place where decisions are made for us,
where treatment is done to us,
and where our stories are rewritten
to fit someone else’s comfort.

We stand anyway.

We stand with the ones who said
that human rights are not theoretical,
not decorative,
not optional clauses to be suspended
whenever psychiatry or policy demands it.

We stand with those who fought
to breathe autonomy into the world,
to carve our names into law
not as risks
but as citizens.

And we wait for the day
when Australia finally
drops its declarations,
lets go of its disclaimers,
and speaks our rights
without an asterisk.

Until then,
we carry the treaty like a lantern
through the bureaucracy and the dust —
a reminder, a demand,
a promise made,
and still owed.

And don't get us started on OPCAT!
