HEATHER SPEARS

Another refugee poem

When he pulls up his sleeve to show us the scab on his elbow where he fell off the bicycle donated by the Refugee Help and I see again his forearm, striped with the long combings of luxuriant hair

I crumple and shout aloud
I am slung into a sack of dark cloud
its seams drawn tight with leather thongs
and diminishing over the rooftops

My mind blinks, the room is the same no one has moved, or spoken. Or, someone said inconsequential words, perhaps myself.

Is there no other woman so afflicted? My age deranges me with sudden lust, I am powerless, encapsulated.

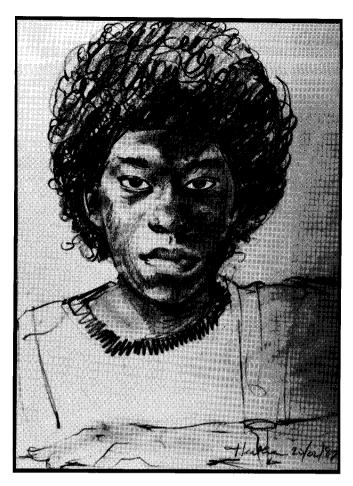
His sleeve falls back, but his forearm fumes like lightning's after-image across my retina. I pour out more tea.

Another year, or two, surely I will have learned How to be in this marvellous world and not of it.

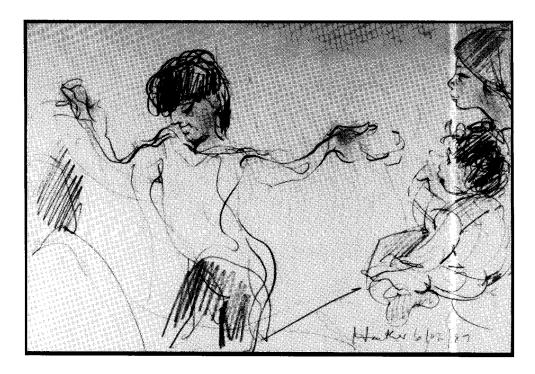
For a woman from the 'Refugees' Friends'

We meet like blind white birds that failed to swerve. When I see your hands' gesture, fleecy with love, or your cheek so wide and watchful, I am mirrored, as you are. Sister, I can't even tell whether your heart holds him as valuable as I would have, whether you guess a fraction of his mystery. How could you, plain, admirable, bent on good, endure the secret burning, the flicker under the thick lashes? 'I cannot bear to be with him, it is anguish. Once for a game, he let me bite against the muscle of his hand. It was sweet with dangerous salt. he laughed: Enough --in his own language.'

From The Word for Sand (Toronto: Wolsak and Wynn, 1988).







Emissary

As if I knew already what Sharaf had to say my eyes on his hands clasped between his knees as he leans forward, pretending hesitation out of courtesy.

So your war follows you into this passive peace, this place of bridges and islands. I have walked the streets and did not smell

the blood and sulphur, or know that what deranged

your hearts was not memory, as I believed,

but promise. It is hope that splinters the melon of our simple love.

I never smelled that jasmine.

This is important.

What is now

cannot compare ---

though it seems to me more real, Sharaf's hands knitted in apology

my loss opening like a quiet door.

From The Word for Sand (Toronto: Wolsak and Wynn, 1988).



VOLUME 10, NUMBER 1 141