

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 be-
lieved,
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).

