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Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Refugee

Abhijit Sarmah

*Release me, and restore me to the ground;
Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave*

— Alfred Tennyson, 'Tithonus'

I.

In a camp of over a million refugees,
the only unfamiliar face is
his mother's.

II.

The raven scratches the ground
but the refugee has no land
to bury himself in.

III.

The refugee left his childhood
to the fens,
now it's a firefly.

IV.

Life and death
Are one.
Life and death and refugees
Are one.

V.

What to count on a Sunday evening?

Planets, stars, dragonflies

Or surviving refugees?

VI.

They say, one must know

What to ask for when hungry

The refugees ask for blue skies

And savannahs

VII.

Every time the old refugee

Tells a joke

It is his laugh that is

Funnier than the joke

VIII.

Life moves at a fixed pace

Like clouds, and

Brown warm water of rivers.

Life halts

Only for the refugees.

IX.

Walking along the elms (the limits)

It is quite common

For him to plunge into
Happiness. Every other
Refugee thinks he's crazy.

X.

Often
Everything looks exactly
Like how you remember them.
He told once: a single memory
is enough
To live a lifetime.
"Them refugees, liars, them bastards!"

XI.

Portraits of refugees
Are the easiest:
Capture their tired eyes,
Their sun-burnt chests and
Memories of their land
On the foreheads.

XII.

Autumn leaves are falling.
The refugees must be dying.

XIII.

It was not too hungry

For summer, yet

Not too cold for prayers.

The refugee knelt

And was gone.

Poet's Bio:

Abhijit Sarmah is a writer, poet and screenwriter from the North-east Indian state of Assam. He has one collection of poetry, *Dying with a Little Patience* (2020), and a chapbook of poetry, *The Voice Under Silence* (2016), to his credit. He has contributed to various print and online journals, including *South 85 Journal*, *Salmon Creek Journal*, *Not Very Quiet* and others.