# She Would Like to Speak with You

What is it like to be a refugee?

Start with someone who is a librarian, a nurse, a teacher, a journalist,
Someone who is also a mother, a wife, her mother's daughter,
Someone who has brought life into the world, one, two, three times,
Someone who never raised her hand against anyone,
Certainly never with a knife, never with a gun.  Never with a bomb.

Fire artillery shells at her apartment building,
Shoot her brother with a sniper's bullet,
Turn her daughter's school into a prison where her uncle was tortured in the gym.
Take away her home, her job, her beloved cat, her family pictures, as you
Toss her into the back of a neighbor's pick-up truck in the middle of the night,
So that she can ride in the dust with her husband and children toward a border
Which she knows already is closed.

Let her watch the last of her family's money flow into the hands of smugglers.
Let her share the last of her family's food with strangers who have none.
Let her wonder why the nations who have so much money for the endless war
Are strangely absent while she sleeps on concrete, in mud, beside railroad tracks,
In the rain.

Let her know the parched heat of a desert,
Let her know the cold wet wind, the choppy black waves,
The wail of her terrified child,
As she crosses the sea at night from hell to hopefully some lesser hell.

Let a stranger in a wetsuit carry her child to the rocky shore.
Let her lose her woolen scarf as she takes from a stranger's hands
A dry sweater, a dry coat.

Let her be taken with her family by bus to a nice safe camp where they can
Eat and sleep and meet briefly with a doctor,
Before another bus takes them across the island
To a "detention center" which is a prison
Without enough beds,
So they sleep on the concrete, inside the fence, under the same stars
That once shone over her home . . . her home.

What is it like to be a refugee?
She would like to speak with you, so that she could say,
"Once I was a person too."

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John Slade