

Home, by Warsan Shire

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no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied
no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer

than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough
the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save

be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important
no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

Main photograph by Daniet Etter/New York Times/Redux /eyevine. Laith Majid cries tears of joy and relief that he and his children have made it to Europe.



Warsan Shire is a Kenyan-born Somali poet, writer and educator based in London. Born in 1988, Warsan has read her work extensively all over Britain and internationally – including recent readings in South Africa, Italy, Germany, Canada, North America and Kenya- and her début book, ‘TEACHING MY MOTHER HOW TO GIVE BIRTH’ (flipped eye), was published in 2011. Her poems have been published in Wasafiri, Magma and Poetry Review and in the anthology ‘The Salt Book of Younger Poets’ (Salt, 2011). She is the current poetry editor at SPOOK magazine. In 2012 she represented Somalia at the Poetry Parnassus, the festival of the world poets at the Southbank, London. She is a Complete Works II poet. Her poetry has been translated into Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. Warsan is also the unanimous winner of the 2013 Inaugural Brunel University African Poetry Prize.