

Ghetto Rhapsody . . .

Slipping through the thin space between the curtains,
the sun gently caressed the naked coffee skin on Teresa's back.
It's warm fingers glided across her body
as a lover would slide his hands
down her thigh after showering.
The populace of water bubbles would melt
under his touch.

The scurrying of a rat across the black wooden floor
slaps Teresa awake. She cracks a brown eye on the sly
to fool life into thinking she's still asleep;
so now it'll turn its attention away from her,
while she contemplates making her escape from the world
just the opening of her eyes away.

When the sun is devoured by the earth,
the civil war outside her window intensifies.
Opposing troops deploying under cover of darkness.
Last night was no different.
She heard the munitions roaring, machine guns cackling, and
her people screaming.
Only / now when again the sun rules the sky
does she hear the nagging of the police sirens and
of the ambulances
when they come to cart away the war dead.

Her baby screamed last night. Nisha wasn't hungry.
She didn't seem tired or hot, despite the tenement making
the mother and child feel like
they lived in the cornea of the August sun.
Nisha screamed
because she was grasping
the language of her world.
Lying almost naked beside her mother, she stares at the vessel
that carried her here. Her eyes smile and don't question,
but simply watch and follow.
Teresa kisses the forehead
of her sometimes impatient passenger
on that nine month voyage on which Nisha embarked.
She rubs noses with her child.
Her baby's awake and life knows Teresa is up, too.
The woman child of seventeen sighs. Life knows
that she's not sleeping. Teresa knows that she must face it.

Anthony Bridgeman