

POETRY

The featherweight fighter

The Nepalese refugee, seventy-eight years old,
Lay before me, shrouded in a stained blanket, hiding.
The subtle quivering of his head told me
That the weight of my words, so much heavier
Than his slight frame, had penetrated his cotton shield.

His cancer would spread, like the hungry bacteria
Living in the carton of warm yogurt at his bedside.
His beloved cure-all Indian curry leaves? Powerless,
Like my silent pleas before the biopsy results.
He is silent, so I bow my head and turn away.

Childlike, his cachectic arm reaches out
Struggling to make a connection with me,
With something. His life has always been
Disconnected by war and geography; by powers
Greater even than the odds now before him.

His eyes burn into mine. He will fight this,
With medicine, with science, with our paradigm
So foreign to his spiritual roots, which like moorings
Seem to keep him from floating away on a current
Of air, toward an uncertain and capricious horizon.

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