

REFUGEE

Dinka Dekaris 2020

The refugee, it was not me.
I was not the one being forced to flee.
Scorching flames and heavy smoke
that caused every living thing to choke.
I was not there, on the ground
fighting for my very life,
trying to escape the strife.
At least not this time around.

From the safety of my lounge room chair
I watched the news each day
feeling lucky to be here, not there.
Quite when it changed, I cannot say.

Maybe it was that koala that they found
with singed and blackened paws,
wandering the scorched, hot ground;
or the hundreds of birds with their tiny claws
all curled after falling dead from the sky.
Maybe it was this that first made me cry.

The refugee, it is not me.
I told myself, repeatedly.
Those people that have lost their home
and those who perished all alone;
they are the true victims here
of this terrible, hot, dry year.
A possum stuck up a burning tree,
clinging oh so desperately,
is surely more of a refugee
than I will ever be.
So I told myself repeatedly.
But still the heartache grew in me.

By the end of December
things took a turn for the worse.
Some even said it was a curse.
Either way, we will all remember.
How can anyone forget?
The fires that razed our coastal towns.
The flames leaping high in the tree crowns.
We knew that it was not over, yet;
not by a long shot.
It was summer and it was hot
with the forests dry and the temperatures soaring
the beast of the fire leapt forward roaring.

Inside me the heartache grew stronger
and it seemed to take so much longer
to remind myself I was not there, but here.
The danger always seemed so near,
if not to me, then someone dear.

The refugee, it is not me.
I recite religiously.
Yet my level of belief
remains as low as it could be.
For example:
When I saw a friend sobbing in relief
his horses had survived and were waiting at the gate.
Oh mate
I sobbed, too
and so would you.
Although we were not there, but here.
Although we are far, not near.
In our hearts we are all connected
and that is what I hold most dear.