

Life History

1

He finds his sister's glove
among the bootprints in
a snowdrift near the wood.

2

He takes it with him when
he hikes across the mountains,
begging bread from strangers.

3

A new identity
he never quite gets used to
acquaints itself with others.

4

He takes to languages
like landscapes: in each
a job, a girl, a question.

5

When he crosses the ocean
he watches herring gulls
competing for his wake.

6

The woman who becomes
his wife and bears him sons
(no daughter) brings him luck.

7

The hands he labours to
keep occupied attempt
a kind of tenderness.

8

He takes no interest
in politics, but sport
absorbs the idle hours.

9

He examines a face
in the mirror, no longer
his sister's younger brother.

10

He sings his granddaughter
a foreign song, but stops
when she bursts into tears.

11

Woken by explosions
when the century ends,
he takes a sleeping pill.

12

With nothing left of what
he once imagined all
there was, he wants for nothing.

Gregory Woods

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*This poem and the one by A C Clarke are from **Over Land, Over Sea: Poems for those seeking refuge**, edited by Kathleen Bell, Emma Lee and Siobhan Logan, published by Five Leaves, £9.99. Proceeds support Leicester City of Sanctuary, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum, and Médecins sans Frontières. At about the time this collection appeared in December 2015, Nottingham was formally recognised as a UNESCO City of Literature, one of 20 in the world. Comprising work from poets who mostly live in the English East Midlands, this volume reflects an internationalist approach in keeping with UNESCO's purpose of encouraging international peace and universal respect for human rights by promoting collaboration among nations.*

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