

Citizenship test

*(Letter to accompany an application for asylum
from the head of the family with whom the applicant is staying)*

Sir, I know this boy.
He fled when they burned his home in the mountains
southeast of Turkey.

He still walks the ridge
where guards made their mark
on his twelve year old thigh.

He stopped his ears
as the soldiers entered
his nine year old sister.

This boy has watched
the sunset on pity
and there is no beauty.

What is it, you ask,
that language he speaks?
(Your question is heavy).

How many can he?
Only the one, only his own
learned from his mother

and the songs of strangers
round half-mended walls
of unwelcome tents

as he crossed unmarked
unmarked borders
of indifferent states.

You say, he must learn ours
if he wants to live here.
Yet he already has

thirty or more
names for the wind.
He never translates.

When you talk of his flight
please think about birds
— their costly migration

the strength of their hope
the weight of their wings
and the sigh of their landing.

Marie-Therese Taylor