The Half-Life of Memory

my earliest space
was the war-torn country
of England, hiding
in the air-raid shelter
as planes bombed the city

I remember
the day I returned home
from evacuation
recognising my mother's face
and hearing her sweet voice

home was a city
of ragged school children
playing tin-can Tommy,
eating toffee-apples,
bodies arced in laughter

home where power cuts
left everyone in sudden dark,
where bellies couldn't be filled,
where food was rationed
and mum made bone broth

our first marital home
was in a suburban street
but in a distant country
waited our second home
with its native plants and trees

it was not easy to leave
our first home and our families
without looking back
as we journeyed to a new country
seeking a better life

I tell nothing of my land
I sing no homeland songs
about the past –
the green and the evergreen,
the fragrance of spring flowers

by day I pass
under a sun-flooded sky
it is now my sky
far from the old country
with its memories of home

when I leave my home
I come back, turn on the light –
it offers me
a plate, a chair, a bed,
waiting for a sign of love

too long
I have lived in this house
too long in this room,
among these walls, under
the same roof, until I die

the plight of refugees
trapped between borders
how we can we help?
we offer hundreds a new home
in our safe, beautiful country

– Patricia Prime*

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