



The Photograph

The magazine picture xeroxed a duplicate print
in my brain. Its caption Mother
cradles child dying of starvation
turned my thumb toward the page corner
but her burned paper eyes insisted
without hope or pity on mine.
I wondered if his spidery legs had ever been
chubby and tried to believe
it was not the same for her
as it would be for me that skin and hair
and geography or non-vitamin expectations
or her own hard hunger might numb her.
Still there was the angle of her arms.

Though it was weeks before I carried my son
to the steps for September to cool him
draped across me blond head larger
and heavy as stone his skin scorching mine
sun-marked legs and arms suddenly thin
she crouched beside me beseeching Allah
and antibiotics knowing their limitations
watching the patterns of delicate bones
searching the dreadful peace
of early evening for a flight of small birds.

Now I weep for her son, remembering the hours
empty milk cartons weren't toys
dangerous things lay in low places
all day the gate to the street gaped open.

Linda Sillitoe has published recently in *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, *Exponent II*, and *The Ensign*.