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Syford Poetry Contest, Honorable Mention

The World's Refuse

Refuse – waste, something that is discarded as worthless or useless.

“Kibera,” means the jungle.

Two square miles, it is the home of 1 million people.
It's not on a map, no one claims it.
There are few trees, no open spaces.
People are everywhere, they sleep
crowded together, in houses of mud
with roofs made of tin. The streets
slime with sludge, sticking to everything.
In narrow allies, clothes hang drying as the red earth sticks.

A child comes, her belly protruding, her limbs twigs.
No one knows her name;
no one cares where she is going.
Barefoot she walks upon
discarded peelings, mud-clogged plastic bags.
Open trenches drain sewage and garbage,
which clogs the stream -
the slum's water supply.

We pass rows of small businesses,
bars brewing their beer in polluted barrels,
chickens squawking and getting underfoot.
Next to a trench two children sit picking at the earth.
Dogs straggle by heavy with pups
or lying unmoved.
They do not bark, they do not approach,
they simply don't care.

This is Kibera, the second largest slum in Africa.
This is Kibera, where one of every four people in Nairobi, Kenya live.

Public toilets are non-existent,
instead feces are wrapped in plastic
and tossed aside. These are the flying toilets.
Flying toilets exist when
there is nowhere else to put
what we produce.

Parents are claimed by sickness and death.
Children remain, evidence of what was.
They find their way to the trenches,
forgotten and unwanted. They too
are flying toilets. Waste tossed aside.

This is Kibera, where 50% of the residents are kids.
This is Kibera, where 30% of the children have aids.
This is Kibera, where 100,000 are orphaned.
This is Kibera, where one in four girls is raped before the age of 10.

“Muzungu, Muzungu,” the children cry.
I am Muzungu – I am the outside world.
The white person in a sea of dark faces.
I am Muzungu evidence that there it something
apart from Kibera.

Children run towards us, grasping our hands.
Perhaps by clinging to us they won't be forgotten.

This is Kibera, where there is not enough water
not enough food
not enough clothing
not enough love
but a plentitude of refuse.