

REFUGEE MOTHER AND CHILD (A Poem) by Chinua Achebe

No Madonna and Child could touch
that picture of a mother's tenderness
for a son she soon would have to forget.
The air was heavy with odours

of diarrhoea of unwashed children
with washed-out ribs and dried-up
bottoms struggling in laboured
steps behind blown empty bellies.

Most mothers there had long ceased
to care but not this one; she held
a ghost smile between her teeth
and in her eyes the ghost of a mother's
pride as she combed the rust-coloured
hair left on his skull and then –

singing in her eyes – began carefully
to part it... In another life this
would have been a little daily
act of no consequence before his
breakfast and school; now she

did it like putting flowers
on a tiny grave.