All Night the Rain

Nancy W. Prothro
ALL NIGHT THE RAIN

I

All night the rain follows me, down black underground rivers, into caverns of sleeplessness. The rain swallows me down:

"Touch me. I'm sharp as ice. Touch me, the splinter in your eye."

II

Swoop the chimney, swallow, my mother is dying. In her hair is the dew of kisses she never gave us. Her hands are young. She speaks harshly, as if we were children sullen at dinner.

How often I ran to the sea's edge, stood on the shore washed by moonlight: tidepools of stars, caves urine-damp, marines by a bonfire drunk and singing.

III

Ash, ash. He stirs the smouldering flame. Ash. His daughter is not there, though the pigs still root the yard and here are the buttons from her blouse. Ash. He stirs and stirs, but she is gone.

Where are they now, who went to war, who left the war? Once soldiers marched. I followed a coffin, carrying the army blanket of one who would not return.

IV

Tonight the stars are teeth. The sky's jaw hangs wide. Mother, your songs once whittled the dark, hummed me a kingdom, sucked from my ear the splinters of crying—

Oh, Johnny, marry me now; the moon fills with dust; it's late.