

“Refugees”

Until half past eight Pin's daughter belongs
to the pocked concrete walls the puffs of steam
and the piles of pieces she makes into clothing
to the rhythms and roaring of the machines
She walks home more slowly in the summer
to let the warm wind sweep the day from her face
In the tiny apartment the television
mutters advertisements out the window beside
her mother who greets her who cannot see
There was a forest and two great rivers
that Pin's daughter can no longer remember
There was the bombing and there was the lesson
of the stolen rice in the meeting hall
and the beating and then Pin's daughter belonged
to her mother for whom the world disappeared
She cooks fish and rice Her mother nods
and eats and smiles and tells the story
of the leave-taking from Vaisali
At ten o'clock she goes to her room
Pin's daughter's husband who tells riddles
as her father used to but in different words
comes home to share the two night hours
they belong to each other On the couch
he asks the question he has saved for her
She sleeps with the answer waiting on her tongue