

Profile with Rain · Gary Soto

Having polished my shoes,
Having rolled my laces with a little spit,
I put a matchbook in the bottom of my left shoe
And looked at myself in the mirror:
The mirror was right. My teeth were too big
For my 14-year-old head.
Still, I left the house and circled my loneliness
With two other strays, their backs wet,
Their fangs worn down to meager pebbles.
I circled my hometown. A girl was somewhere,
Perhaps behind that kitchen window:
A bored girl writing her name in the crumbs
Gathered at the warmth of a chrome toaster.
A girl was combing her hair
And rereading her boyfriend's sloppy letter.
A girl was fussing in her closet—
A skirt with chains and the heavy hearts of anchors.
I looked down at my dog friends. Rain clinged
To their faces. When I spoke, my breath was white.
When I put a finger to a steamy car window,
I wrote, "God help me."
I returned home to look at myself in the mirror:
My teeth were even bigger now that my hair
Was matted to my head. I took off shoes
And socks. I pulled out the soggy matchbook—
The choir of matches and the shifty words
Of a correspondence school:
"Draw this profile. You may be talented."
I considered the girl with half a face,
Sweetheart with not much to go on.
Rain fell from my hair when I picked up a pen
And, biting my bottom lip, started with her eyes.