

Classic Poetry Series

Hugh Sykes Davies

- poems -

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Music in an Empty House

The house was empty and
the people of the house
gone many months

Months for the weevil
for the patient worm
timber-mole softly tunnelling
for the parliament of rats

Footsteps slink past
damp walls
down
long
corridors

Slow feet
warily scuff
bare boards
The much-bitten
tapestry
holds
many
moths

In a certain curtain'd room
the halting steps evade
chairs white shrouded

To twitch the winding-sheet
around a grand piano
thin phalanx of sound
sharp rat's teeth edge yellow
with decay

The much-bitten
tapestry
holds
many
moths

On rat's teeth-edge
fingers preparate
hesitate

Then falling send
as tenantry
darnp-muffied chords
rusting strings
a still-born song

<table cellpadding=0 cellspacing=0> <tr><td align=left>Their fortissimo</td><td
width=20></td><td align=left>The tattered</td></tr> <tr><td align=left>

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scarce</td><td width=20></td><td align=left>tapestry</td></tr> <tr><td  
align=left> stirs</td><td width=20></td><td align=left>holds</td></tr> <tr><td  
align=left> near</td><td width=20></td><td align=left>many</td></tr> <tr><td  
align=left> cobwebs</td><td width=20></td><td align=left>moths</td></tr>  
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Hugh Sykes Davies

Poem

In the stump of the old tree, where the heart has rotted out, there is a hole the length of a man's arm, and a dank pool at the bottom of it where the rain gathers, and the old leaves turn into lacy skeletons. But do not put your hand down to see, because

in the stumps of old trees, where the hearts have rotted out, there are holes the length of a man's arm, and dank pools at the bottom where the rain gathers and old leaves turn to lace, and the beak of a dead bird gapes like a trap. But do not put your hand down to see, because

in the stumps of old trees with rotten hearts, where the rain gathers and the laced leaves and the dead bird like a trap, there are holes the length of a man's arm, and in every crevice of the rotten wood grow weasel's eyes like molluscs, their lids open and shut with the tide. But do not put your hand down to see, because ...

... in the stumps of old trees where the hearts have rotted out there are holes the length of a man's arm where the weasels are trapped and the letters of the rook language are laced on the sodden leaves, and at the bottom there is a man's arm. But do not put your hand down to see, because

in the stumps of old trees where the hearts have rotted out there are deep holes and dank pools where the rain gathers, and if you ever put your hand down to see, you can wipe it in the sharp grass till it bleeds, but you'll never want to eat with it again.

Hugh Sykes Davies