

DANIEL KEENE

Nocturnes

PART ONE

1.

The room
is dark.

Quiet at last,
deny all pity

and breathe
without answers;

be brief
as wet to a stone.

2.

Not the singing of tales,
nor the scent of a young mouth,

nor the hands of a friend.
Not the silver boughs of her

arms as she lay asleep
beside you; no, not even

love. Nothing prepares you
for sorrow's quickening thaw.

3.

Will you sleep? With the voice
of a child, answer

yes, and then close your eyes.
The light was cruel, too

familiar. The air swells,
grows colder. The dark

will rain all night: you are
lifted in the flood.

4.

You wake in the night to all
that has replaced you: the dead dream

of you; all the names, the vows,
all the last times your eye has washed;

the bodies, the love, so much
forgetting; and this room that soars

above your faceless face; all
these words that freeze on the slab.

5.

A bird in its wings,
folded, complete: one dull

flame, burning. The soft
orb of her sleeping

eye holds time in place:
all she knows sleeps

with her, burns within,
melts the world to her.

6.

Salt white moon, North, South.
Pale space; lamp, wall, and bed, and

lamp. Someone has died
and someone is dying now.

Windows conjure you
from the darkness; your face lit

by dreams of you: great
sigh somewhere of sleep.

7.

You fall silently
into an empty room; where

rain beats, so many
years ago. As light and deft

as a humming bird
you sip cold, mercurial

waters: your wings throb
on the other side of night.

8.

Your face falls on the dark,
voiceless as a stone

or the heart; in the space
of your blood, in this

last room of your life or
still the first, you float

on the water of all
you are and become.

9.

Leaning on a face of blood,
night is your whole body

weeping. When you fall from dark
to deep light, to substance

continually rising,
speech falling from you, who

will know you, in the searing
cold of your embrace.

10.

Turning, lost somehow,
falling through

trees to stone and then
to the fine

water of herself:
feathers and

summers, flight, and
solitude.

11.

Child, did you see
the bird fall?

Less and less you'll
see: look now,

calmly. The first
blessings are

swift and common.
Take them all.

PART TWO

Descant

1.

Heavy as a dream,
witless in light,

knowing only
the hard thin road

he found when he first
stood up,

up to his eyes
in the dark of his body.

2.

Memory failing,
her life
slips and floods:

she has gone;
a small girl running
to mock those labourers

sleeping
in wet fields
at the close of day.

3.

You, the stumbling boy,
more perilous
than love;

your face,
downward cast,
lost

for thirty years,
again shines
and stalks for home,

now
burns
in this cold room.

4.

Oracle Birds

In some troubled hour, your
thin bedsheet soaked, dreaming

of having lived, of death's
tremor, of sockets once

your eyes, from black air they
break like sobs, plucking out

one fact, weaving a nest
in the tree of your blood.

PART THREE

Even now I feel your trembling hand
pass through me like a vein of water.

Child, even then you felt the weight
hanging inside you, even then.

Time will run through your bones like rain,
in the tidal songs of your eyes.

The house will turn on its corner whispering
forgotten words, stars burn on your window.

It will be an ordinary room, your motionless body
on the shore of sleep, by ashen water.

Your sunken life will rise
in the dark's orphaned light.

*

Time was silent; oracles
everywhere: your face

in the strange night
where you are foretold.

*

A well, where night mirrors
lost irises, lost summer

rooms; a well of evening's thirst
for what belonged to you.

*

A child with immense hands
rises towards you,

dripping light,
holding your dead face.

*

The desolate voice asking
Who is there? Who?

The russet voice of water
boned with cold.

*

It is the same world,
exactly the same:

a bird, in the last
speakable light.

*

The soft music
of rain dripping

You cannot tell the water
who you are.

*

Dreaming
you climb

branches of dull flame:
implacable child.

July 1993