

# Vigil

*by* Beate Sigriddaughter

You have arrived at the river,  
numb with the murmur of the city  
and the sleeplessness of anger, boredom,  
and too many people loving  
too many people too much.  
The heat in this night,  
not the moon as in ancient poems,  
is blazing; the moon is pink  
like the washed-out dress  
of an impoverished child. The thick dust  
of the city lies around it, heavy  
like a distance, and it would be easier if  
you could sleep. But there is so much absence:  
One girl's long dark hair not touching you,  
but flooding you more deeply than a dream.  
You imagine her sleeping, cradled  
in the faithfulness for which you came  
to her too late. You imagine  
everyone sleeping, you also  
imagine her stepping behind you  
now in a dance that will not be. You  
do not turn around to the impossibility,  
so that she ebbs away into the hours  
of dark stones. Twice in this night  
the watchmen asked what you were doing  
in the city, meekly  
you explained and hated  
the suspicion in their eyes, the frowned  
expectation that you did not belong  
there, and soon you may begin to agree,  
even if you have your keys along.  
You had to leave before, for the third time

asking, they would have convinced you.  
So you came to the river,  
to the earliest call of the birds,  
wishing you could touch their impatience  
for day, for you have none  
inside this ceaselessness of being.  
And suddenly you pity the world  
for all its beauty that you cannot hold,  
its secrets that may always wash away  
from you, like water from your hands,  
downstream, where finally you lose  
the waves to darkness, and to  
the slow rift in the horizon  
that grows like a patient cadence of music  
into the weight of the sky,  
or like invisible hands pushing up  
the heaviness as though by prayer,  
letting the disk of the sun glide  
out from the water like a mercy, for there is  
nothing the dust of the city  
can do to alter the sun that mirrors  
you in water as you follow  
with your eyes until it is  
complete, forbidding it its brightness.  
And between the sun and you the trees  
stand calmly, combing the light  
with their still branches, and suddenly  
you do not need a god, or love  
to hold this rising of the world  
for you, out of the dark.  
You wonder what these trees are called.

