

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.

