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# BLAKE

P O E M

In Memory of Geoffrey Keynes, Kt., late of  
Lammas House, 1887-1982

Jon Stallworthy

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In Memory of Geoffrey Keynes, Kt.  
late of Lammas House  
1887-1982

When wing to wing, feather by feather,  
the rooks were piecing night together,  
I took the ring the iron-lipped  
iron-lidded lion gripped  
and tapped the call-sign on his hide.  
He knew me, nodded, moved aside,  
and as the light fell through the door  
I walked into your head once more.

I could distinguish, layer by layer,  
each constituent of the air:  
vellum and beeswax; apple, oak,  
and elm gone up in years of smoke;  
tanned pastry, ghosts of roasted meat;  
the breath of oxlips, wintersweet,  
jasmine, and Stanely Spencer's tall  
corinthian hyacinths on the wall.

The old clock in a fancy waist-coat cleared its throat and, poker-faced,  
pointed to Margaret's room. I must  
have slipped in without sound or gust,  
for on the mantelpiece the frieze  
had thawed and bountiful Ceres  
bowed from a festal chariot drawn  
by cherubs shouldering sheaves of corn  
for Lammas. Darwin in a chair  
inhaled his beard. And through a pair  
of ancient spectacles, tugged free  
from a book's teeth, I could see  
a knickerbockered boy advance  
to greet a flock of bustled aunts.  
The clock struck. They went out like flames—  
leaving their shadows, shrunk, in frames.

And I went also, up the stairs  
where Catherine Blake's embroidered hares  
danced in the moonlight. Ran a bath  
under the gaze of a lithograph  
“Sixty-four Years a Queen,” to whom  
I bowed: “Allow me to presume  
to higher strains if you will use  
it first, ma'am.” “We are not a muse.”

And so to such a downy bed  
and downy pillow that the head  
no sooner settled . . . than today  
came in with teacups on a tray.

But not today, and not again  
the day sketched over the counterpane,  
an airy canvas, to be swept  
with sunlight in a south transept,

and more than sunlight as we walk  
through Danes' Blood, welling from the chalk,  
or in the workshop carve those two  
owl-guardians of your gateposts, who  
today, frock-coated mourners, keen  
for you as we process between.  
Your books cry your name from the shelf,  
but where's your masterpiece—Yourself?

Not in your house, or over there  
in Brinkley churchyard's flinty loam.  
The rooks return and riot,  
the rooks return and you do not.  
I shall know where to find you, how-  
ever, forever. Old master, now  
that your fire's out, draw up a chair  
to mine, and make yourself at home.

Jon Stallworthy

