

Insomnia

By Dana Gioia

Now you hear what the house has to say.
Pipes clanking, water running in the dark,
the mortgaged walls shifting in discomfort,
and voices mounting in an endless drone
of small complaints like the sounds of a family
that year by year you've learned how to ignore.

But now you must listen to the things you own,
all that you've worked for these past years,
the murmur of property, of things in disrepair,
the moving parts about to come undone,
and twisting in the sheets remember all
the faces you could not bring yourself to love.

How many voices have escaped you until now,
the venting furnace, the floorboards underfoot,
the steady accusations of the clock
numbering the minutes no one will mark.
The terrible clarity this moment brings,
the useless insight, the unbroken dark.

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It seems almost a requirement for a poet to have an unconventional résumé, but Dana Gioia's is perhaps notable for being so conventionally unpoetic. A graduate of Stanford Business School, Gioia claims to be "the only person, in history, who went to business school to be a poet." He later rose to become a vice president at General Foods. He served as chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts from 2003 to 2008 and is the Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture at the University of Southern California. In 2015, Gioia was named Poet Laureate of California. Although Gioia writes in free verse, he is known primarily for his formal work, and has been included in the school of New Formalism, a movement in the 1990s by American poets to bring traditional verse forms back to the fore.

