Black Rock

GERRIE FELLOWS

I

In my kitchen musing one rain-splashed
evening on the old plans of women climbing
I turn my face against your jacket's hollow
nap asking How can this have happened

And there is no answer No words

but the rooks' rough melody over Applegarth
or against the roof of Black Rock the clatter
of the wind mimicking your restless dreams
the night breathing through your empty bed

II

It seems as if we kept coming back to make
those moves In drifting heat the mind
floating only the rope (umbilical cord
of the flung body) moving through the hands
teaching the fingerprints the route's codes
its hesitations the tug to clip a runner

If I climbed now your gear clanking
from my harness would your tall shadow
with its rough grace reappear

III

I dreamt you were Persephone given time
in the living world woke to some kind
of salve or sweating mistaken having
cut your skirt to fit my shape found you
were still alive

After three years your presence in these
clothes the shrunken jersey the jeans
nipped in at the waist is odourless
no more than a ghost You are gone

IV

And yet in August putting away the stove
and zipping the tent and last of all lacing
our boots and trudging up to the glacier
through the casually rigorous afternoon
not climbing yet not expecting stonefall
on the path I thought over and over
This is how it was

Helen memorials are fixed or moving They
are the lethal spin of a pebble in a gully
or on a route a rockfall's thunder
and in all these mountains the mounds
of scree your true gravestone