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LOUISE GLÜCK

SUNRISE

This time of year, the window boxes smell of the hills,
the thyme and rosemary that grew there,
crammed into the narrow spaces between the rocks
and, lower down, where there was real dirt,
competing with other things, blueberries and currants,
the small shrubby trees the bees love—
Whatever we ate smelled of the hills,
even when there was almost nothing.
Or maybe that’s what nothing tastes like, thyme and rosemary.
Maybe, too, that’s what it looks like—
beautiful, like the hills, the rocks above the tree line
webbed with sweet-smelling herbs,
the small plants glittering with dew—
It was a big event to climb up there and wait for dawn,
seeing what the sun sees as it slides out from behind the rocks,
and what you couldn’t see, you imagined;
your eyes would go as far as they could, to the river, say,
and your mind would do the rest—
And if you missed a day, there was always the next,
and if you missed a year, it didn’t matter,
the hills weren’t going anywhere,
the thyme and rosemary kept coming back,
the sun kept rising, the bushes kept bearing fruit—
The streetlight’s off: that’s dawn here.
It’s on: that’s twilight.
Either way, no one looks up. Everyone just pushes ahead,
and the smell of the past is everywhere,
the thyme and rosemary rubbing against your clothes,
the smell of too many illusions—
I went back but I didn’t stay.
Everyone I cared about was gone,
some dead, some disappeared into one of those places that don’t exist,
the ones we dreamed about because we saw them from the top of the hills—
I had to see if the fields were still shining,
the sun telling the same lies about how beautiful the world is
when all you need to know of a place is, do people live there.
If they do, you know everything.
Between them, the hills and sky took up all the room.

Whatever was left, that was ours for a while.
But sooner or later the hills will take it back, give it to the animals.
And maybe the moon will send the seas there
and where we once lived will be a stream or river coiling around the base of the hills,
paying the sky the compliment of reflection—
Blue in summer. White when the snow falls.