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LOUISE GLÜCK

THRESHING

The sky’s light behind the mountain
though the sun is gone—this light
is like the sun’s shadow, passing over the earth.
Before, when the sun was high,
you couldn’t look at the sky or you’d go blind.
That time of day, the men don’t work.
They lie in the shade, waiting, resting;
their undershirts are stained with sweat.
But under the trees it’s cool,
like the flask of water that gets passed around.
A green awning’s over their heads, blocking the sun.
No talk, just the leaves rustling in the heat,
the sound of the water moving from hand to hand.
This hour or two is the best time of day.
Not asleep, not awake, not drunk,
and the women far away
so that the day becomes suddenly calm, quiet and expansive,
without the women’s turbulence.
The men lie under their canopy, apart from the heat,
as though the work were done.
Beyond the fields, the river’s soundless, motionless—
scum mottles the surface.
To a man, they know when the hour’s gone.
The flask gets put away, the bread, if there’s bread.
The leaves darken a little, the shadows change.
The sun’s moving again, taking the men along,
regardless of their preferences.
Above the fields, the heat’s fierce still, even in decline.
The machines stand where they were left,
patient, waiting for the men’s return.
The sky’s bright, but twilight is coming.
The wheat has to be threshed; many hours remain
before the work is finished.
And afterward, walking home through the fields,
dealing with the evening.
So much time best forgotten.
Tense, unable to sleep, the woman’s soft body
always shifting closer—

That time in the woods: that was reality.
This is the dream.