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LOUISE GLÜCK

PHENOMENAL SURVIVALS OF DEATH IN NANTUCKET

I
Here in Nantucket does the tiny soul
Confront the water. Yet this element is not foreign soil;
I see the water as extension of my mind,
The troubled part, and waves the waves of mind
When in Nantucket they collapsed in epilepsy
On the bare shore. I see
A shawled figure when I am asleep who says, “Our lives
Are strands between the miracles of birth
And death. I am Saint Elizabeth.
In my basket are knives.”
Awake I see Nantucket, the familiar earth.
II
Awake I see Nantucket but with this bell
Of voice I can toll you token of regions below visible:
On the third night came
A hurricane; my Saint Elizabeth came
Not and nothing could prevent the rent
Craft from its determined end. Waves dent-
ed with lightning launched my loosed mast
To fly downward, I following. They do not tell
You but bones turned coral still smell
Amid forsaken treasure. I have been past
What you hear in a shell.
III
Past what you hear in a shell, the roar,
Is the true bottom: infamous calm. The doctor
Having shut the door sat me down, took ropes
Out of reach, firearms, and with high hopes
Promised that Saint Elizabeth carried
Only foodstuffs or some flowers for charity, nor was I buried
Under the vacation island of Nantucket where
Beach animals dwell in relative compatibility and peace.
Flies, snails. Asleep I saw these
Beings as complacent angels of the land and air.
When dawn comes to the sea’s
IV
Acres of shining white body in Nantucket

I shall not remember otherwise but wear a locket
With my lover’s hair inside
And walk like a bride, and wear him inside.
From these shallows expands
The mercy of the sea.
My first house shall be built on these sands,
My second in the sea.