HAVEPOETRY.COM

LOUISE GLÜCK

DEDICATION TO HUNGER

1. From the Suburbs

They cross the yard
and at the back door
the mother sees with pleasure
how alike they are, father and daughter—
I know something of that time.
The little girl purposefully
swinging her arms, laughing
her stark laugh:
It should be kept secret, that sound.
It means she’s realized
that he never touches her.
She is a child; he could touch her
if he wanted to.

2. Grandmother

“Often I would stand at the window—
your grandfather
was a young man then—
waiting, in the early evening.”
That is what marriage is.
I watch the tiny figure
changing to a man
as he moves toward her,
the last light rings in his hair.
I do not question
their happiness. And he rushes in
with his young man’s hunger,
so proud to have taught her that:
his kiss would have been
clearly tender—
Of course, of course. Except
it might as well have been
his hand over her mouth.

3. Eros

To be male, always
to go to women
and be taken back
into the pierced flesh:

I suppose
memory is stirred.
And the girl child
who wills herself
into her father’s arms
likewise loved him
second. Nor is she told
what need to express.
There is a look one sees,
the mouth somehow desperate—
Because the bond
cannot be proven.
4. The Deviation
It begins quietly
in certain female children:
the fear of death, taking as its form
dedication to hunger,
because a woman’s body
is a grave; it will accept
anything. I remember
lying in bed at night
touching the soft, digressive breasts,
touching, at fifteen,
the interfering flesh
that I would sacrifice
until the limbs were free
of blossom and subterfuge: I felt
what I feel now, aligning these words—
it is the same need to perfect,
of which death is the mere byproduct.
5. Sacred Objects
Today in the field I saw
the hard, active buds of the dogwood
and wanted, as we say, to capture them,
to make them eternal. That is the premise
of renunciation: the child,
having no self to speak of,
comes to life in denial—
I stood apart in that achievement,
in that power to expose
the underlying body, like a god
for whose deed
there is no parallel in the natural world.