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LOUISE GLÜCK

METAMORPHOSIS

1. Night
The angel of death flies
low over my father’s bed.
Only my mother sees. She and my father
are alone in the room.
She bends over him to touch
his hand, his forehead. She is
so used to mothering
that now she strokes his body
as she would the other children’s,
first gently, then
inured to suffering.
Nothing is any different.
Even the spot on the lung
was always there.
2. Metamorphosis
My father has forgotten me
in the excitement of dying.
Like a child who will not eat,
he takes no notice of anything.
I sit at the edge of his bed
while the living circle us
like so many tree stumps.
Once, for the smallest
fraction of an instant, I thought
he was alive in the present again;
then he looked at me
as a blind man stares
straight into the sun, since
whatever it could do to him
is done already.
Then his flushed face
turned away from the contract.
3. For My Father
I’m going to live without you
as I learned once
to live without my mother.
You think I don’t remember that?

I’ve spent my whole life trying to remember.
Now, after so much solitude,
death doesn’t frighten me,
not yours, not mine either.
And those words, the last time,
have no power over me. I know
intense love always leads to mourning.
For once, your body doesn’t frighten me.
From time to time, I run my hand over your face
lightly, like a dustcloth.
What can shock me now? I feel
no coldness that can’t be explained.
Against your cheek, my hand is warm
and full of tenderness.