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LOUISE GLÜCK

BASKETS

1.
It is a good thing,
in the marketplace
the old woman trying to decide
among the lettuces,
impartial, weighing the heads,
examining
the outer leaves, even
sniffing them to catch
a scent of earth
of which, on one head,
some trace remains—not
the substance but
the residue—so
she prefers it to
the other, more
estranged heads, it
being freshest: nodding
briskly at the vendor’s wife,
she makes this preference known,
an old woman, yet
vigorous in judgment.
2.
The circle of the world—
in its midst, a dog
sits at the edge of the fountain.
The children playing there,
coming and going from the village,
pause to greet him, the impulsive
losing interest in play,
in the little village of sticks
adorned with blue fragments of pottery;
they squat beside the dog
who stretches in the hot dust:
arrows of sunlight
dance around him.
Now, in the field beyond,
some great event is ending.

In twos and threes, boldly
swinging their shirts,
the athletes stroll away, scattering
red and blue, blue and dazzling purple
over the plain ground,
over the trivial surface.
3.
Lord, who gave me
my solitude, I watch
the sun descending:
in the marketplace
the stalls empty, the remaining children
bicker at the fountain—
But even at night, when it can’t be seen,
the flame of the sun
still heats the pavements.
That’s why, on earth,
so much life’s sprung up,
because the sun maintains
steady warmth at its periphery.
Does this suggest your meaning:
that the game resumes,
in the dust beneath
the infant god of the fountain;
there is nothing fixed,
there is no assurance of death—
4.
I take my basket to the brazen market,
to the gathering place.
I ask you, how much beauty
can a person bear? It is
heavier than ugliness, even the burden
of emptiness is nothing beside it.
Crates of eggs, papaya, sacks of yellow lemons—
I am not a strong woman. It isn’t easy
to want so much, to walk
with such a heavy basket, either
bent reed, or willow.