LOUISE GLÜCK

A PARABLE

It was an epoch of heroes.
So this young boy, this nobody,
making his way from one plain to another,
picks up a small stone among the cold, unspecified
rocks of the hillside. It is a pleasant day.
At his feet, normal vegetation, the few white flowers
like stars, the leaves woolly, sage-green:
at the bottom of the hill are corpses.
Who is the enemy? Who has distributed
the compact bodies of the Jews
in this unprecedented silence? Disguised in dirt,
the scattered army sees the beast, Goliath,
towering above the childish shepherd.
They shut their eyes. And all the level earth
becomes the shattered surface of a sea, so disruptive
is that fall. In the ensuing dust, David
lifts his hand: then it is his, the hushed,
completed kingdom—
Fellow Jews, to plot a hero’s journey
is to trace a mountain: hero to god, god to ruler.
At the precipice, the moment we don’t want to hear about—
the stone is gone; now
the hand is the weapon.
On the palace roof, King David stares across
the shining city of Jerusalem
into the face of Bathsheba and perceives
his own amplified desire. At heart, he feels nothing.
She is like a flower in a tub of water. Above his head,
the clouds move. And it comes to him he has attained
all he is capable of dreaming.