LOUISE GLÜCK

# DAY WITHOUT NIGHT

The angel of god pushed the child’s hand
away from the jewels, toward the burning coal.
1.
The image
of truth is fire: it mounts
the fortress of heaven.
Have you never felt
its obvious power?
Even a child
is capable of this joy.
Apparently,
a like sun
burns in hell. It is hell,
day without night.
2.
It was as though Pharaoh’s daughter
had brought home a lion cub
and for a few weeks
passed it off as a cat.
You did not press this woman.
She said she came upon
a child in the rushes;
each time she told the story,
her handmaidens recreated
their interminable chorus of sighs.
It had to be:
A little prince. A little lion cub.
3.
And then with almost no encouragement
a sign came: for awhile
the child is like
a grandson to Pharaoh.
Then he squirms; on Pharaoh’s lap
he reaches for the crown of Egypt—
4.
So Pharaoh set before the child
two trays, one of rubies, one of burning embers:
Light of my heart, the world

is set before you:
fire on either side, fire
without alternative—
5.
It was like a magic act: all you saw
was the child move; the same hand that took
such active interest in
the wealth of Egypt showed
this sudden preference for a pile of coal.
You never saw the actual angel.
And to complete the act,
the child maimed himself—
And a cry arose,
almost as though a person
were in hell,
where there is nothing to do
but see—
6.
Moses
lay in the rushes:
he could see
only in one direction,
his perspective being
narrowed by the basket.
What he saw
was great light, like
a wing hovering.
And god said to him,
“You can be the favored one,
the one who tastes fire
and cannot speak,
or you can die now
and let the others
stay in Egypt: tell them
it was better to die in Egypt,
better to litter the river
with your corpse, than face
a new world.”
7.
It was as though a soul emerged,
independent of the angel,
a conscious being choosing
not to enter paradise—
at the same time, the true

sun was setting.
As it touched the water
by necessity the mirrored sun rose
to meet it from
the depths of the river:
Then the cry ended.
Or was hidden
in the stammering
of the redeemer—
8.
The context
of truth is darkness: it sweeps
the deserts of Israel.
Are you taken in
by lights, by illusions?
Here is your path to god,
who has no name, whose hand
is invisible: a trick
of moonlight on the dark water.