LOUISE GLÜCK

FROM THE JAPANESE

1.
A cat stirs in the material world.
And suddenly sunlight pours into the room
as though somewhere a blind had been opened.
And on the floor, the white bars of a ladder appear.
2.
Gwen is sobbing in the front yard; she is three.
The Spanish maid strokes her hair—Gwen
is bilingual; she dries her eyes,
a few petals falling from the jacaranda tree.
Now the door opens: here is Jack, the athlete, in his combat boots.
For the next hour he runs
first away from, then toward his family.
And here is Trixie, roaming the driveway,
huge in comparison
to the rigid bird. Boring bird,
that will not chirp and fight anymore.
She flicks it once or twice,
under the grapefruit, under the lemon tree.
Early summer: fog covers the mountains.
Under each tree, a doily of shade.
3.
At first, I saw you everywhere.
Now only in certain things,
at longer intervals.
4.
We were walking in the Japanese gardens
among the bare cherry trees,
a path you chose
deliberately in desolate November
as though I myself had ordered down
the petals, the black
nuggets of the fruit—
Nearby, a boy sailed his wooden boat,
home and away, home and away.
Then the thread snapped; the boat
was carried toward the waterfall.
“From this moment I will never know

ease," you said, "since you have lied to me,
nor joy." The boy
covered his face with his hands.
There is another world,
neither air nor water
but an emptiness which now
a symbol has entered.
5.
The cat
misses her master.
She climbs the brick wall,
a feat
Gwen determines
to copy: loud
objections from the Spanish maid.
Tears, shuffling. At the water's edge,
the boy finally
lowered his hands.
He had a new toy, a thread
tied to a lost thing—
Twilight: in her blue sombrero,
Gwen reconstructs the summer garden.
6.
Alone, watching the moon rise:
tonight, a full circle,
like a woman's eye passing over abundance.
This is the most it will ever be.
Above the blank street, the imperfections
solved by night—
Like our hearts: darkness
showed us their capacity.
Our full hearts—at the time, they seemed so impressive.
Cries, moans, our important suffering.
A hand at the small of the back
or on the breast—
And now across the wall
someone is clearing the table,
wrapping the dark bread and the white ceramic pot of butter.
What did we think?
What did we talk about?
Upstairs, a light goes on.
It must be
Gwen's, it burns
the span of a story—

7.
Why love what you will lose?
There is nothing else to love.
8.
Last night in bed your
hand fell heavily upon
my shoulder. I thought
you slept. Yet we are
parted. Perhaps the sheet moved,
given your hand’s weight by
the dampness of
my body. Morning: I have
written to thank you.
9.
The cat sleeps on the sidewalk,
black against the white cement.
The brave are patient.
They are the priests of sunrise,
lions on the ramparts, the promontory.