LOUISE GLÜCK

LEGEND

My father’s father came
to New York from Dhlua:
one misfortune followed another.
In Hungary, a scholar, a man of property.
Then failure: an immigrant
rolling cigars in a cold basement.
He was like Joseph in Egypt.
At night, he walked the city;
spray of the harbor
turned to tears on his face.
Tears of grief for Dhlua—forty houses,
a few cows grazing the rich meadows—
Though the great soul is said to be
a star, a beacon,
what it resembles better is a diamond:
in the whole world there is nothing
hard enough to change it.
Unfortunate being, have you ceased to feel
the grandeur of the world
that, like a heavy weight, shaped
the soul of my grandfather?
From the factory, like sad birds his dreams
flew to Dhlua, grasping in their beaks
as from moist earth in which a man could see
the shape of his own footprint,
scattered images, loose bits of the village;
and as he packed the leaves, so within his soul
this weight compressed scraps of Dhlua
into principles, abstractions
worthy of the challenge of bondage:
in such a world, to scorn
privilege, to love
reason and justice, always
to speak the truth—
which has been
the salvation of our people
since to speak the truth gives
the illusion of freedom.