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LOUISE GLÜCK

A NOVEL

No one could write a novel about this family:
too many similar characters. Besides, they’re all women;
there was only one hero.
Now the hero’s dead. Like echoes, the women last longer;
they’re all too tough for their own good.
From this point on, nothing changes:
there’s no plot without a hero.
In this house, when you say plot what you mean is love story.
The women can’t get moving.
Oh, they get dressed, they eat, they keep up appearances.
But there’s no action, no development of character.
They’re all determined to suppress
criticism of the hero. The problem is
he’s weak; his scenes specify
his function but not his nature.
Maybe that explains why his death wasn’t moving.
First he’s sitting at the head of the table,
where the figurehead is most needed.
Then he’s dying, a few feet away, his wife holding a mirror under his mouth.
Amazing, how they keep busy, these women, the wife and two daughters.
Setting the table, clearing the dishes away.
Each heart pierced through with a sword.