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LOUISE GLÜCK

LOVER OF FLOWERS

In our family, everyone loves flowers.
That’s why the graves are so odd:
no flowers, just padlocks of grass,
and in the center, plaques of granite,
the inscriptions terse, the shallow letters
sometimes filling with dirt.
To clean them out, you use your handkerchief.
With my sister, it’s different,
it’s an obsession. Weekends, she sits on my mother’s porch,
reading catalogues. Every autumn, she plants bulbs by the brick stoop;
every spring, waits for flowers.
No one discusses cost. It’s understood
my mother pays; after all,
it’s her garden, every flower
planted for my father. They both see
the house as his true grave.
Not everything thrives on Long Island.
Sometimes the summer gets too hot;
sometimes a heavy rain beats down the flowers.
That’s how the poppies died, after one day,
because they’re very fragile.
My mother’s tense, upset about my sister:
now she’ll never know how beautiful they were,
pure pink, with no dark spots. That means
she’s going to feel deprived again.
But for my sister, that’s the condition of love.
She was my father’s daughter:
the face of love, to her,
is the face turning away.