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LOUISE GLÜCK

# WIDOWS

My mother’s playing cards with my aunt,
Spite and Malice, the family pastime, the game
my grandmother taught all her daughters.
Midsummer: too hot to go out.
Today, my aunt’s ahead; she’s getting the good cards.
My mother’s dragging, having trouble with her concentration.
She can’t get used to her own bed this summer.
She had no trouble last summer,
getting used to the floor. She learned to sleep there
to be near my father.
He was dying; he got a special bed.
My aunt doesn’t give an inch, doesn’t make
allowance for my mother’s weariness.
It’s how they were raised: you show respect by fighting.
To let up insults the opponent.
Each player has one pile to the left, five cards in the hand.
It’s good to stay inside on days like this,
to stay where it’s cool.
And this is better than other games, better than solitaire.
My grandmother thought ahead; she prepared her daughters.
They have cards; they have each other.
They don’t need any more companionship.
All afternoon the game goes on but the sun doesn’t move.
It just keeps beating down, turning the grass yellow.
That’s how it must seem to my mother.
And then, suddenly, something is over.
My aunt’s been at it longer; maybe that’s why she’s playing better.
Her cards evaporate: that’s what you want, that’s the object: in the end,
the one who has nothing wins.