LOUISE GLÜCK

NEW WORLD

As I saw it,
all my mother’s life, my father
held her down, like
lead strapped to her ankles.
She was
buoyant by nature;
she wanted to travel,
go to theater, go to museums.
What he wanted
was to lie on the couch
with the Times
over his face,
so that death, when it came,
wouldn’t seem a significant change.
In couples like this,
where the agreement
is to do things together,
it’s always the active one
who concedes, who gives.
You can’t go to museums
with someone who won’t
open his eyes.
I thought my father’s death
would free my mother.
In a sense, it has:
she takes trips, looks at
great art. But she’s floating.
Like some child’s balloon
that gets lost the minute
it isn’t held.
Or like an astronaut
who somehow loses the ship
and has to drift in space
knowing, however long it lasts,
this is what’s left of being alive: she’s free
in that sense.
Without relation to earth.