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LOUISE GLÜCK

CHILDREN COMING HOME FROM SCHOOL

1.
If you live in a city, it’s different: someone has to meet
the child at the bus stop. There’s a reason. A child all alone
can disappear, get lost, maybe forever.
My sister’s daughter wants to walk home alone; she thinks she’s old enough.
My sister thinks it’s too soon for such a big change;
the best her daughter gets
is the option to walk without holding hands.
That’s what they do; they compromise, which anyone
can manage for a few blocks. My niece gets one hand
totally free; my sister says
if she’s old enough to walk this way, she’s old enough
to hold her own violin.
2.
My son accuses me
of his unhappiness, not
in words, but in the way
he stares at the ground, inching
slowly up the driveway: he knows
I’m watching. That’s why
he greets the cat,
to show he’s capable
of open affection.
My father used
the dog in the same way.
My son and I, we’re the living
experts in silence.
Snow’s sweeping the sky;
it shifts directions, going
first steadily down, then sideways.
3.
One thing you learn, growing up with my sister:
you learn that rules don’t mean anything.
Sooner or later, whatever you’re waiting to hear will get itself said.
It doesn’t matter what it is: I love you or I’ll never speak to you again.
It all gets said, often in the same night.
Then you slip in, you take advantage. There are ways
to hold a person to what’s been said; for example, by using the word promise.

But you have to have patience; you have to be able to wait, to listen.
My niece knows that in time, with intelligence, she’ll get everything she wants.
It’s not a bad life. Of course, she has those gifts,
time and intelligence.