LOUISE GLÜCK

COUSINS

My son’s very graceful; he has perfect balance.
He’s not competitive, like my sister’s daughter.
Day and night, she’s always practicing.
Today, it’s hitting softballs into the copper beech,
retrieving them, hitting them again.
After a while, no one even watches her.
If she were any stronger, the tree would be bald.
My son won’t play with her; he won’t even ride bicycles with her.
She accepts that; she’s used to playing by herself.
The way she sees it, it isn’t personal:
whoever won’t play doesn’t like losing.
It’s not that my son’s inept, that he doesn’t do things well.
I’ve watched him race: he’s natural, effortless—
right from the first, he takes the lead.
And then he stops. It’s as though he was born rejecting
the solitude of the victor.
My sister’s daughter doesn’t have that problem.
She may as well be first; she’s already alone.