LOUISE GLÜCK

PARADISE

I grew up in a village: now
it’s almost a city.
People came from the city, wanting
something simple, something
better for the children.
Clean air; nearby
a little stable.
All the streets
named after sweethearts or girl children.
Our house was gray, the sort of place
you buy to raise a family.
My mother’s still there, all alone.
When she’s lonely, she watches television.
The houses get closer together,
the old trees die or get taken down.
In some ways, my father’s
close, too; we call
a stone by his name.
Now, above his head, the grass blinks,
in spring, when the snow has melted.
Then the lilac blooms, heavy, like clusters of grapes.
They always said
I was like my father, the way he showed
contempt for emotion.
They’re the emotional ones,
my sister and my mother.
More and more
my sister comes from the city,
weeds, tidies the garden. My mother
lets her take over: she’s the one
who cares, the one who does the work.
To her, it looks like country—
the clipped lawns, strips of colored flowers.
She doesn’t know what it once was.
But I know. Like Adam,
I was the firstborn.
Believe me, you never heal,
you never forget the ache in your side,

the place where something was taken away
to make another person.