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In the Empty House

Louise Glück

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GOLDSBERRY, CARLILE, McELROY, SADOFF,
MEZEY, HALPERN, MYERS, NELSON, SMITH,
HALL, TURCO

In the Empty House / Louise Gluck

1.
Why do you call it empty?
You yourself are there
and your companions
the chairs, one dark green,
one rose color. Now, at twilight,
they compete for your weight.

And across the room
a pencil forms, the painted wood
fills with a cylinder of memory.
Already it contains your dreams;
it lies, rigid with them,
until one by one
they disappear into writing. . . .

2.
Afterward you have no needs:
The past is tired of you,
it has closed your room,
it has given your treasures to someone else.

A broken moon hangs in the window.
Below it is a small mat.
You used to sit there
writing in your book.
The room was full of voices,
the voice of the bed,
the guarded voice of the mirror,
counseling stillness.

3.
So the stars come forward,
pressing at the cold glass.

Once, long ago, you lay
beside a stream, not sleeping.
Cells of light floated on the water;
they rocked gently,
held by white threads.

And in the deep grass your lover stirred,
as real as memory,
his mouth touching your cheek
so the skin
was marked when you turned away.

4.
It is as though they were still
waiting for you.
The light is on, the potted jade
covered with thin hairs of dust.

Soon for the first time
the house will be empty
where your parents lie
clinging to one another
with the same loneliness
that forced you to be born.

In their dreams they are safe:
it is summer, the lawn
in its green slipcover
gripping the street.

The Gift / Louise Gluck

Lord, You may not recognize me
speaking for someone else.
I have a son. He is
so little, so ignorant.
He likes to stand
at the screen door calling