1973

For My Mother

Louise Gluck

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THE POND

Night covers the pond with its wing.
Under the ringed moon I can make out
Your face swimming among minnows and the small
Echoing stars. In the night air
The surface of the pond is metal.

Within, your eyes are open. They contain
A memory I recognize, as though
We had been children together. Our ponies
Grazed on the hill, they were gray
With white markings. Now they graze
With the dead who wait
Like children under their granite breastplates,
Lucid and helpless:

The hills are far away. They rise up
Blacker than childhood.
What do you think of, lying so quietly
By the water? When you look that way
I want to touch you, but
Do not, seeing
As in another life we were of the same blood.

FOR MY MOTHER

It was better when we were
Together in one body.
Thirty years. Screened
Through the green glass
Of your eye, moonlight
Filtered into my bones
As we lay
In the big bed, in the dark,
Waiting for my father.
Thirty years. He closed
Your eyelids with
two kisses. And then spring
came and withdrew from me
the absolute
knowledge of the unborn
leaving the brick stoop
where you stand, shading
your eyes, but
it is night, the moon
is stationed in the beechtree
round and white among
the small tin markers of the stars:
Thirty years. A marsh grows up
around the house. Schools of spores
circulate behind the shades, drift
through gauze flutterings of vegetation.

Gemini

Stanley Plumly

I don’t want to begin like a reviewer—because my intent is to try to touch
something essential in these three poems and then get off the page—but let me
go on like one for just a moment: Louise Glück has always been a poet of
severity, constriction and obsession. If Firstborn, her one book to date, represents
a sequence of high-powered concentrations of psychic energy, in which both the
emphatic rhythms and rhymes serve to intensify the needs of the speaking voice
—usually one of several personae—then the three poems here illustrate not only
an alteration of method, but an augmentation of matter. The brilliant rhetorical
bias of the early poems tends to restrict their emotional range: experience is
more often judged then revealed; the possibility for ambiguity more often
anticipated than realized. The new poems, however, are much more open to
emotional alternatives. They bear none of the burden of language acting under
certain prescriptive tests and expectations. And they are written in the singular
and personal voice of the poet. The obsessions remain, but they are now so
limited to the egocentricity of a persona. End of school.

What I find so moving in these poems is the authority of their “absolute knowl-
edge”: since the present must be at best provisional, it’s in the potential of the
past that we find our lives. This sounds Proustian, of course, like saying that all
poems are poems of memory—recollected, in this case, in anxiety. But the paradox
animates these poems. They meditate, as well as mediate, over terrifying denials,
yet the very presence of their language depends on a primary confrontation