

LATONA AND HER CHILDREN

ELIZABETH
GARCIA

—after William Rinehart's sculpture at the Met

"We shall pass over the various speculations of modern writers respecting the origin and nature of this divinity, and shall mention only the most probable, according to which Leto is 'the obscure' or 'concealed,' not as a physical power, but as a divinity yet quiescent and invisible, from whom is issued the visible divinity with all his splendour and brilliancy."

—William Smith, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*

"Lotus seed sprouts after sleeping 1200 years."

—Deseret News, June 8, 1996

I.

Pearled bodies, dimpled, plump with light,
stone fat, milk-fed baby gods, asleep
at last, their Mother, light-washed, watching: brief
repose, the density of mother love, the weight
of rapture fixed in marble, breathing caught
and stilled—one move could break the fragile tip
of quiet—all you little mothers, worship
this way, worship this love, acolyte;
if your body strains with monastery
toil, if the coil of every muscle knows
monotony, the minor chords of ache
await resolve—with all the selves you carry
on your hip, like arpeggios, compose
yourself. Be still, be glowing when they wake.

II.

Superego, putting me to sleep
with your marble tone of mothering—
be still and listen:

water

lisping, Lethe whispering Her name:
oblivion.

Like Nobody—

she'll need some trick to slip the cave we've got her
in. Like Father named I Am,
Mother, I am Not. Is She

our unspeakable gift—mind's deep
dream water, a kind forgetting,
the brain erased of some original thing?

III.

Brain erased
first something
tongue knows it
cymbal crash

origins something
utter what
what tongue's
makes Dad's

brown belt
which tree
releases sums
what search

buckle clack
shaken loose
blooms thought
could reach

a thing black
mass holds
fear what
absence what

holed light
tight what
law binds
cut frees it

buoyed from
things lost

a town below
to reservoir

IV.

things once lost to reservoir
surface with the right unsettling

bodies half secreted in silt
neglected crossbeams any moonlike branch

the air's long abeyance to the light
a slow unknowing of what one has known

they arrive at night, bob like rumor
on the surface of a truth mingle

in the sky's spill of milk still
hungry for the living world every

inner cell a room of want what
body but hers could know an empty room

know it filled and greening suckle any
petaled body in her lotus lap

V.

lotus petals bud the soft lap
of water their milky bellies an archive of tides

of all mankind can tolerate their open
palms imply the absence of evidence

is not the evidence of abandonment
that is to say even on a night

with no moon the moon knows itself
knows even distant water being

willed retains desire all desire
being known can be remembered dive

eel-like down abandon pattern find
the seed of seed the daughters who can waken

from a thousand-year sleep they will
silt-sown sprout from pond throat their old longing

VI.

That old longing, throated, sprouts their pond-sown
arms, stammers elbow from their shells,

emerald from mud. How much muscle
needs that bony shaft of light to reach

this deep down and coax her open, what
word unfurl her inner girl, green

wing and sepal tongued, wide peduncle
born to an already teneted world? Speak

her older name, Nelum, let its alveolar
make your mouth an oval room, another

place to worship, watch her thousand greenest
pods, engorged with love, balloon to breast,

to brown areolae, to aureole,
to something that our tongues almost recall.

VII.

(Our tongues almost recall some thing we cannot
name: which is the memory, and which)

*Friends, all sweet-soft petals only seem,
but we are here to guard you from that dream.*

(the dream? What was our arrival here?
Was there the war ((the war is here)) or there)

*In that place, all things will seem the same;
we are here to guard your given name.*

(the blank before? Same, they say, as if
the same could never be endured. No)

*Come back to children, to the Fatherland,
your loving masters' kind and gentle hands.*

(What is the thing we must recall? ((Her
body, pearled and dimpled, plump with light))