



The Conjuring

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how a horse, or more, rose
from the water, still and gray
as a lake how could they know
the truth: an ambush of snow

how the crane called to its kin
faint, auriga moving through
a home, stranger, a shadow
falling low across the limen

how a mare stood sentinel
by the door, wise eyes wide
unblinking foaling sprawling
twin kings, a flagstone floor

how we bore your temper wild
spur upon our backs a man
hounded, as our mother yet
outruns us, how she stuns us


with her pain, mooned belly
heaving life, sharp her cries
cursing their men days five
lineal nine across the line

how the birds shift beneath
lust's gaze, how they turned
on you, swift as a whipping
boy caught in a bind of rage

how they trembled, the fury
filled sprites as you suffered
the life you were denied then
married to the envy of a bride

how they'll swear you loved
but one of us, singular, true:
balking, bridled, only one —
brother standing before you.



A large, expressive ink wash painting of a face, likely a woman, serves as the background for the text. The face is rendered with bold, dark ink strokes for the eyes, nose, and mouth, and lighter, more delicate washes for the skin and hair. The overall style is traditional Chinese ink painting, with a focus on capturing the essence of the subject through brushwork and ink tones.

You were first from the shore of her, the dam who slipped us in the dark;
who slung like coin her womb's worth at the door, left us to weave our tongues
in each other's eyes; to lick the water from our backs, the Moorhen at our mouths.
I smelled her once in fog, the night the sounds of war split beyond the fort —
trills of curlew magicked into cries of slaughtered men, wind-tap of branches
shaped to clanging blades. And when they saddled us and led us
to the Valley of the Deaf, we tasted her on grasses, in the downwind rot
of that hooked and sweet-flowered tree; heard her heave in the draws of river,
her groan in pushing us from pools — white cascades popping at the falls
our birth-bleached hooves. Was she in the blood that let from your eye?
That shape aroused in the wine that spilled three times, or in the woman at the crossing ford,
all sorrows and spoiled armour, who wept he was to die? Was her snort the gale that lunged

a spear of some warrior's spited kin, tore Láegh from his root like a soft-soiled yew,
ran him as a spring beneath our hocks? What could I but run, and Cú Chulainn torn
like a bag of meal, regarding with wonder that hole in himself — little rat rip,
clean as a saddler's punch — like a blink in recollection, or a net laboured into shore
only to see it fat with his own catch, and picked by many hands? I left him for the sorceresses,
and salmon-snorted home; broke woodlands with my goosegrass breast, stamped crescents
in mud and shale, startled a hag turning rope in the dew, passed strangers' palisades,
and laughing children mad like calves at dusk, until I stood and shook before water in the glen.
And when I dipped my shameful head to step beneath a mirror of the moon, your form went hurtling
from the shimmer of my lips: turning in the bindweed root like an otter hunting crays;
broken pottery of skulls a shingle beneath your feet, the thirty skins behind your teeth.
And I saw Cú Chulainn, too, pinned to the stone in his own twines, a sick-cloth fluttering
in wind, in current; saw the raven berry-picking hedges of his bursting sides.
I will leave this Milesian pit, this festered wound in water; will slip beneath the tail of it,
grow wings again and drown, before her.

Dubh Sainglend to Liath Macha, on Cú Chulainn's Death

Micheal Dooley

