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# Under the Maud-Moon

Galway Kinnell

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## Under the Maud-Moon

by Galway Kinnell

1

A fat-  
cheeked girl-child comes awake  
in her crib, chortling  
and yodelling  
to the day, the green  
swaddlings tear open, a filament  
or vestment tears,

and she who is born,  
she who sings and cries,  
she who begins the passage, her hair  
sprouting out,  
her gums budding for her first spring on earth,  
the mist still clinging  
about her face, puts  
her hand into  
her father's mouth to clutch  
his song.

2

It is all over, little one,  
the flipping  
and overleaping, the watery  
somersaulting alone in the oneness  
under the hill,  
under the old lonely bellybutton  
pushing forth again  
in remembrance,  
the drifting there furled in the dark, pressing  
a knee or elbow down the slippery  
wall, sculpting existence  
with a foot, streams  
of omphalos blood singing all about you.

3

Her head  
enters the headhold  
through which she starts rising:  
being itself

clamps down all over her, gives her  
into the shuddering grip  
of departure, the huge, agonized clenches  
making the last perfect molds of her  
as she goes.

4

The eye  
of darkness opens, the pupil  
doozed with black hairs  
stops, the chakra  
on top of the brain  
throbs a long moment in world light.

And she skids out on her face into light,  
this peck  
of stunned flesh clotted  
with celestial cheesiness, glowing  
with the astral violet  
of the underlife. And as they cut  
her tie to the darkness, she dies  
a moment, turns  
blue as a coal, the limbs shaking  
as the memories rush out of them. And when  
they hang her up by the feet  
she sucks  
air, she screams  
her first song—and turns rose,

the slow,  
beating, featherless arms  
already clutching at the emptiness.

5

When it was cold  
on our hillside, and you cried  
in the crib rocking  
through the darkness on wood  
knifed down to the curve  
of the smile, a sadness  
stranger than ours, all of it  
flowing from the other world,

I used to come to you  
and sit by you  
and sing to you. You did not know,

and yet you will remember,  
in the silent  
zones of the brain, a spectre,  
descendant of the ghostly forefathers, singing  
to you in the night-time—not the songs  
of light streaming  
through the golden hair of the angels—  
a blacker  
rasping flowering on that tongue.

6

For when the Maud-moon  
glimmered in those first nights, and the Archer  
lay sucking  
up the icy beestings  
of the cosmos, in his crib  
of stars,

I had crept down  
to riverbanks, their long  
rustle of being and perishing, down to marshes  
where the earth oozes up  
in cold streaks, touching the world  
with the underglimmer  
of the beginning,

and there learned my only song.

7

And in the days  
when you find yourself orphaned,  
emptied of wing-singing, of light, pieces  
of cursed bread  
on your tongue,

there shall come back to you  
a voice, spectral,  
calling you  
*sister!* from everything which dies.

And then  
you shall open  
this book, even  
if it is the book of nightmares.