

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.