

The Dream of Aengus mac Og

A hundred and fifty swans – a brood, a bank,
a bevy, a drift, a game, a herd, a silence, a sownder,

a team, a wedge, a shining, a whiting, a whiteness
(or blackness), an eyrar among the reeds sheltering

cygnets, and in the cold waters of Loch Bel Dracon
a stir of drooped feathers. A long lamentation.

Sick for love of a girl he'd seen only in dreams,
Aengus mac Og, favorite child of the de Dannan,

like Krishna, wooed flowers in the bright fields
of summer, then languished a year and a day

in his mother's house, longer far than nine months
the sun stood still so he could be born

in a single shining between dark and light.
Now he stood on the bank of Loch Bel Dracon,

brought there by three score of his father's best
chariots, six score of Eriu's finest horses, strong men

enough to fill the Boyne Valley, their boots treading
a new road, their breath changing the weather.

Dazzled, he watched as below, between jagged rocks
and furred water, three fifties of golden-haired

girls changed to white-breasted swans linked
in pairs held in place by a curse and a silver chain.

Somewhere among them beat the faery heart
of Caer Ibormeith. How was he to claim her?

In the quick cold November wind, Aengus stood alone,
his body made frail, near death, for love of this girl

who could change in an instant from maid to swan
to ripe yew berry to hazelnut, iridescence of brook trout

leaping, swift threads of music, laughter wrinkling
the shining air. Gathering his strength

in the form of a mighty swan, Aengus lifted
his quiet voice:

“Come to me, Caer Iborneith.
Aengus is calling.”

The silver chain fell away, and the faery maid rose up
out of the water. Aengus wrapped her in his wings,

circled with her three times around wild Loch
Bel Dracon and they flew away in a tumble

of leaves, a rush of air and white feathers,
singing so sweetly that all his great company

—three score of fine chariots, six of fine horses,
enough warriors to raise a fog, their booted

feet shaking cygnets from nests
hidden in reeds and trees—every man, woman

and child, every beast within hearing,
entranced by their song, slept

three hundred years, and in fact
may be slumbering still.

(Sarasvati Takes Pegasus As Her Mount (anthology), Tacoma, WA, 2013, Josie Emmons Turner, editor)