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Back on the Water

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VI. Back on the Water

by Matthew Brennan

Then the curragh was carried
in the crook of the ocean

and was supplied by our monks
for many moons.

For before we'd embarked
to our abbot appeared

a youth with yeast bread
and yards of water.

When these goods were gone
and our guts were empty,

a brother named Finnbar,
born of fishermen,

could uncoil a rope
and catch schools of cod

from the deepest fathoms.
If Finnbar were busy,

I learned to lure
puffins and fulmars



onto gunwale and mast

and then grip their necks

and snap them like stems

When our fluids were finished,

we'd upraise our goblets

and gather the raindrops

The abbot determined

our turns at the helm.

On nights when the surface

of the sea was seamless,

I stared at the stars

salting the sky

till my blood was suspended

and my eye put to sleep

so magnificent nature

entered my soul.

And every week

the weather unraveled.

In darkness and fog

the curragh would cartwheel



faster than fulmars

can soar through the clouds;

we'd swerve through the murk

like daemons, not monks.

One night on my watch,

the weather turned wicked.

The boat entered a vortex

of violence and swirling,

blackness all round

and foam in our faces:

The force sucked us inward

while waterfalls flogged

the crossbar and mast,

whipping the canvas

like the back of beast.

Saltwater boulders

tumbled around us

as we took hold in terror.

