

From Lizard to Steed

“Have I your permission?” said the Angel to the Ghost.

“I know it will kill me.”

“It won’t. But supposing it did?”

“You’re right. It would be better to be dead than to live with this creature.”

“Then I may?”

“Damn and blast you! Go on, can’t you? Get it over. Do what you like,” bellowed the Ghost: but ended, whimpering, “God help me. God help me.”

Next moment, the Ghost gave a scream of agony such as I never heard on Earth. The Burning One closed his crimson grip on the reptile: twisted it, while it bit and writhed, and then flung it, broken backed, on the turf.

“Ow! That’s done for me,” gasped the Ghost, reeling backwards.

For a moment I could make out nothing distinctly. Then I saw, between me and the nearest bush, unmistakably solid but growing every moment solidier, the upper arm and the shoulder of a man. Then brighter still and stronger still, the legs and hands. The neck and golden head materialized while I watched, and if my attention had not wavered I should have seen the actual completing of a man—an immense man, naked, not much smaller than the Angel. What distracted me was the fact that at the same moment something seemed to be happening to the Lizard. At first I thought the operation had failed. So far from dying, the creature was still struggling and even growing bigger as it struggled. And as it grew, it changed. Its hinder parts grew rounder. The tail, still flickering, became a tail of hair that flickered between huge and glossy buttocks. Suddenly I started back, rubbing my eyes. What stood before me was the greatest stallion I have ever seen, silvery white, but with mane and tail of gold. It was smooth and shiny, rippled with swells of flesh and muscle, whinnying and stamping with its hoofs. At each stamp the land shook and the trees dindled.

The new-made man turned and clapped the new horse’s neck. It nosed his bright body. Horse and master breathed each into the other’s nostrils. The man turned from it, flung himself at the feet of the Burning One, and embraced them. When he rose I thought his face shone with tears, but it may have been only the liquid love and brightness (one cannot distinguish them in that country) which flowed from him. I had not long to think about it. In joyous haste, young man leaped upon the horse’s back. Turning in his seat he waved a farewell, then nudged the stallion with his heels. They were off before I well knew what was happening. There was riding if you like! I came out as quickly as I could from among the bushes to follow them with my eyes; but already they were only like a shooting star far off on the green plain, and soon among the foothills of the mountains. Then, still like a star, I saw them winding up, scaling what seemed impossible steps, and quicker every moment, till near the dim brow of the landscape, so high that I must strain my neck to see them, they vanished, bright themselves, into the rose-brightness of that everlasting morning.

While I still watched, I noticed that the whole plain and forest were shaking with the sound which in our world would be too large to hear, but there I could take it in with joy. I knew it was not the Solid People who were singing. It was the voice of that Earth, those woods and those waters. A strange archaic, inorganic noise, that came from all directions at once. The Nature or Arch-nature of that land rejoiced to have been once more ridden, and therefore consummated, in the person of the horse. It sang,

The Master says to our master, Come up. Share my rest and splendor till all natures that were your enemies become slaves to dance before you and backs for you to ride, and firmness for your feet to rest on.

From beyond all place and time, out of the very Place, authority will be given you: the strengths that once opposed your will shall be obedient fire in your blood and heavenly thunder in your voice.

Overcome us that, so overcome, we may be ourselves: we desire the beginning of your reign as we desire dawn and dew, wetness at the birth of light.

Master, your Master has appointed you forever: to be our King of Justice and our high Priest.

~C.S. Lewis *The Great Divorce*