

[In north Iceland, August, 1914, two friends saw a woman returning from work in the manner described. The concluding incident explained her haste to arrive.]

THERE was a woman riding hard,
tense form and shawl-wrapt head,
like one from leisure long debarred
craving food and bed.

White in the landscape moved the spot,
the gallant beast she rode
through the late light, for night was not,
winding with the road.

The movement marked her rough, young breath,
restless, impatient heels,
devouring miles of track-scarred heath,
zest a rider feels.

A willing race with day's dim close
the little charger strode.
What Sigrunn, Signy, Sigurros
like a valkyr rode?

The eager rider slackens pace
arriving at the stead;
dismounting swings her leg with grace
over Faxi's head.

Discharged, the horse without a pause
drops his great neck to feed;
the woman up the bank withdraws;
nor gives him heed.

But we two not alone observe
the bleak world's lonely guest;
the riding woman's scorn and nerve;
dash for home and rest.

For now, with synchronising speed,
another woman storms
obliquely down the field to meet
mother and empty arms;

bearing a baby bundled up,
and brandished like a torch;
or proffered as it were a cup,
brimming at a porch.

Ride as a gleaner of the slain;
ride for a light through gloom;
hug and nuzzle and hug again
fruit of the womb.

JOHN GRAY.