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The Heavenly Ladder

John Witte

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JOHN WITTE

The Heavenly Ladder

A beauty beyond us
you stroked her sleek withers
raked and shoveled her stall before your lesson I went on

to the library. A cautious
love you seated the bit. I pored over
the brilliantly illuminated miniatures of the eleventh century.

The horse peevish
frisky I learned what happened
later how our lives diverged the jewel-blue water surging

from the left
across the bottom of the picture
the horse buckjumping pitching you up and down your teacher

covering her mouth
with her hands there was nothing
I could do I was not there I was absorbed by the small figure

of a monk gathering
his violet-blue tunic closer
the shimmering golden ladder extending diagonally into the sky

I had to
imagine you lurching side to side
a black curtain falling between you and the spinning world.

You awoke
on your back under the blue arc
of heaven the enormous head of the horse gazing down.