

The Sultan's Aging Son Recalls the Hippo Hunt

(Italian sonnet)

(from the painting "The Hippopotamus Hunt,"
by Peter Paul Rubens, c. 1615-1616)

"The sultan sent three sons..." *His voice is frail;*
the boys lean in. "On horseback, battlebound,
we marched with two barbarians to the sound
of barking curs at our feet and a distant wail
of hippo. Coming close, we saw her flail
a crocodile about. We circled 'round
them in the bog, on sinking hooves. As a hound
sunk teeth into flesh, we readied to impale

the beast. In a swirl of fangs, of flashing jaws
and daggers, even the horses reared and bit
her hide, then heaved and fell to the croc, to lie
in mud." *He leans, refills his raki, draws*
a breath. "And which brave fighting man, so fit,
came bleeding home, half broken...? Only I."

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