

Woman Releasing a Tongueless Swallow from Her Violin

I

Because I am sad-Irish, I hear the screams of the swallow above me, her tonguelessness in every woman I meet, in the way they become speechless.

And because I've grown frightened for the swallow in her throat, her voice a mixture of screech and saw mill scratching, her ecstasy so bold

as she rises and falls out of chimneys and cold utterings, I listen, always, for the song of the violin on any street, the violin being the heart's larynx.

I see them here, these two young women busking outside a Starbucks in Pike Place Market, the one hoisting her violin up to the blue sky

bursting with deafening sea gulls, and the other, straddling a wooden box, ripping on a saw, making it moan. Look here at this woman in her black

dress, hair pinned up, fish net stockings, her polka-dotted top, her eyes raised up to the sun, fiddling on her violin, releasing from catgut strings

the Irish Swallow Tail Jig.

II

And once, when I was alone in the market, shopping for simple fruit, I saw a woman struck by her husband. It was almost delicate, the practiced

deliberation, the care in his back hand as he met her cheek, and in slow mode she stumbled backwards, away from him into the produce bin

where he caught her in his extended, outstretched arm, like they were tangoing, the apples bobbling behind them in their rows as he languidly

scooped one up to give to her, the violence we do with each other being intimate, being the way we cripple each other in our need. And, as she was

caught by his strong arm, her little mouth, opened up in fright, her teeth, biting the small bird which was her tongue, the swallow in her mouth,

from her throat came a voiceless screech, the swallow song escaping her, along with all the other swallows dipping and forking out of the open

shoulders of the brick buildings of the market on that sunny summer day,
while a solitary violinist, someone hidden from view and fiddling behind

the broken, fetid crates of fruits and vegetables sidled up a jig while the rest
of us, gathered here at the market shopped for food, and as I heard it,

I heard it as the Irish Swallow Tail jig.

III

And so here, in Pike Place Market, along with the women in purple coats,
chestnut scarves covering pale throats, their slender shoulders winged,

I listen to the violin squirming inside the tongueless mouth of the swallow,
setting the jig free so that it swoops down and up the street in ecstasy...

I listen to the woman with a yellow flower in her hair fiddling away on her
violin, while the other woman moans away on her box saw. They do this

so that the tongueless swallow, the tongue sliced out of its pinched mouth
by a god so vengeful he'd slay his own kin in order to take into bed

the innocent girl with the song in her mouth and her desire so hidden,
can find release again...the tongue of a woman being a holy trope, all songs

for the violin being for the tongueless women amongst us who've forgotten
how beautiful they sing, or have longed to raise voice to linger, or have

yelped, or fiddled voice in sorrow, felt skin tingle under caresses of finger or
have been punished in the very act of doing it, all women being free, being

lovely swallows, that sing.