1888: Mrs. Sherwood

by Nonnie Augustine

It's gone too long since her Robby Sherwood's dreams rose
through the tenement chimney into pear-sweet clouds.
Once was he planned histories, carried herself over slopes
of hesitations to the night meadow, soft-skinned and whispered.
Her man shouldered off insulting herds, braced against tumblings.
If violence done him early on hid deep until too many small hungry maws
and no decent way to feed them released the battering storm
of him as is now—so be it. She's done all her forgiving.

Margaret will take her seven away from his raging Irish hammers
slurry Saturday night honks, smashing red eyes.
One more strike from the king of his three room castle
five loud floors up and she'll wrap her pups in her wintry coat,
carry them in her giant's arms to an island green as the sleeves
of St. Patrick's cape and fat with potatoes big as cows.
She'll fill her purse to bursting with lamb stews and fresh milkings.

Margaret notes the hunch of her oldest girl, vows on Katie's sacred
McGuffey Reader to raise her sheilas fierce, her lads tender.
Holy St. Matrimony be damned!
Finished she is with the dead saints too busy to help.
She'll pray to the ancient living fairies to find gentle sanity away
from the devils of Five Corners. They'll board a secret train
countryside bound where they sing the songs of her own dead Mam
who lived poor in the world but rich in her man's honoring.

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On the day she'll blow a pagan's kiss good-bye
leave with a grin and a quick cold nod
of her great victorious mother bear's chin.