

1888: Mrs. Sherwood

by Nonnie Augustine

Margaret will take her seven away from his raging Irish hammers slurry Saturday night honks smashing red eyes. 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.

One more cursing bloody thrashing strike from the king of his three room castle six cold 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.

It's gone too long since her Robby Sherwood's dreams rose from the tenement chimney into pear-sweet clouds; since he saw across oceans, planned histories, carried her young self over slopes of hesitations to night meadows, fragrant and quiet. Once was her man shouldered off insulting herds, braced the tumblings around them. If violence done him early on hid deep until too many small hungry maws and no decent way to feed them released these storms—relentless, battering, battering—so be it. She's done all her forgiving.

Margaret notes the hunch of her oldest boy, vows on his 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 her children gentle sanity away from the devils of Five Corners. Then on the day she'll blow a pagan's kiss to the man and the place, leave with a grin and a good-by nod of her great victorious mother bear's chin.

