

Colleen

Joanna Newsom

I'll tell it as I best know how
And that's the way it was told to me
I must have been a thief or a whore
Then surely was thrown overboard,
Where, they say
I came this way from the deep blue sea

It picked me up and tossed me round
I lost my shoes and tore my gown
I forgot my name and drowned
Then woke up with the surf a pounding
It seemed I had been run aground

Well they took me in and shod my feet
And taught me prayers for chastity
And said my name would be Colleen
And I was blessed among all women
To have forgotten everything

And as the weeks and months ensued
I tried to make myself of use
I tilled and planted, but could not produce
Not root, nor leaf, nor flower, nor bean
Lord! It seemed I over-watered everything.

And I hate the sight of that empty air
Like stepping for a missing stair
And falling forth forever blindly:
Cannot grab hold of anything!
No, not I, most blessed among Colleens

I dream some nights of a funny sea
As soft as a newly born baby
It cries for me so pitifully!
And I dive for my child with a wildness in me
And am so sweetly there received.

But last night came a different dream
A grey and sloping-shouldered thing
Said "what's cinched 'round your waist, Colleen
Is that my very own baleen
No! Have you forgotten everything?"

This morning, 'round the cape at dawn
Some travellers sailed into town
With scraps for sale and the saddest songs
And a book of pictures, leather-bound
That showed a whale with a tusk a meter long

I asked the man who showed it me
"What is the name of that strange beast?"
He said its name translated roughly to
He-Who-Easily-Can-Curve-Himself-Against-The-Sky.

And I am without words
He said "My lady looks perturbed
the light is in your eyes, Colleen."

I said, "Whatever can you mean?"
He leaned in and said
"you ain't forgotten everything."

"You dare to speak a lady's name?"
He said, "My lady is mistaken.
I would not speak your name in this place
For if I were to try then the wind
I swear, would rise, to tear you clean from me without a trace."

"Have you come, then, to rescue me?"
He laughed and said, "from what, 'colleen'?"
You dried and dressed most willingly.
You corseted, and caught the dread disease
By which one comes to know such peace."

Well it's true that I came to know such things
As the laws which govern property
And herbs to feed the babes that wean,
And the welting weight for every season
But still I don't know any goddamned "Colleen".

Then dive down there with the lights to lead
That seem to shine from everything
Down to the bottom of the deep blue sea
Down where your heart beats so slow
And you never in your life have felt so free
Will you come down there with me
Down were our bodies start to seem
Like artefacts of some strange dream
Which afterwards you can't decipher
And so, soon, have forgotten everything.