

Joanna Newsom, Colleen

I'll tell it as I best know how,
And that's the way it was told to me: I
Must have once 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 overwatered 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 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 gray 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.

Well, 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;
and 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
artifacts of some strange dream,
which afterwards you can't decipher,
and so, soon, have forgotten
Everything.