

Grandpa Frankie's Notes

Descended from gypsies, he used to say,
so the violin came more honest than words.
Though an absurdity, still, like a deaf crow
on a rough street he stole the notes that
wafted, flew off lines of laundry dangled out
between tenement windows, pinned there
after a fight with a dear drunken imbecile,
notes that tumbled off belfries on the wings
of pigeons slanting this way and that when
the bells woke them and the drunks below,
notes that journeyed across the murderous
sea, those that previously wove the thatch
of village huts and stoked their sullen fires,
turned the wheels of mud-wagon'd lanes
and urged the days from the gut of a town crier,
in that Czech vlast where the whole land
reverberated like inside the piano above
where he sat hidden under a blanket, his
sister playing Dvorak he was forbidden;
so he got those notes in his travels, black-
wing solos, took them out once he'd found
the violin, pulling them out like hocked
necklaces from a coat sleeve to serenade
here or there a bent-over couple for a coin.
Then they belonged also to the violin he
kept by his pillow like a lover, his arm draped
over at night, so he could feel its delicate
curves, notes of vagabond sing to his sleep,
sing the miraculous grace of Vltavo River,
its moorings where notes were sent, received,
passed along with word, news, stories from
up-river, down-river all this the river, like
blood sent along to mend huge loneliness.
At his funeral, I placed a crow wing-feather
in the button hole over his heart. As they
lowered the casket, a crow flew in from the
east, circled over twice, and off to the west.
It took all those stolen notes, the shiny ones
someone left on a table, the odd plaintive

(Grandpa Frankie's Notes continued)

ones someone sent to the clouds from a
plank porch, the magnificent ones orated
in prayer, in poems, in what is between
two sets of eyes looking a very long time,
took them to the land of souls, where
those winged, waiting with the bowed heads
were in some unfathomable way nourished.