

The Lark Quartet

Four larks on an unseasonal evening
From their first notes made spring
From wands and deep low cello bowing
Like a river under a subway.

New York, we said later. Those tenements
That yet give shelter to bold animals
The russet tail by the dustbin, the birds
Of common breed but rare tenacity

And Mozart, following, reminded you of
Wallpaper. Someone heaving up resolve
To begin another room, scoured by stains.
definitely a sense of "here we go again"

In which after weariness came mastery.
The unavoidable good performance we discussed
Later over cake and coffee. Once started
Mozart invariably knew where he was going

Into misunderstood pauperism. Shostakovich
Wrestled like a chill wind above the ground
A height so hard to obliterate or fold
Into conformity. Last we understood

Most easily: a dance, a movement of folk tunes.
Disharmonies crossed over them like light showers
But we were at our ease now with how
The melody is greatest shown to emerge

A bow's hair ahead of its sound of birth
We are a generation of assemblers
Who want the miracle are not quite clear
But tuned to our attention and our inattentiveness:

Now I could confess I admired the shoes
Of the first violinist and craned to see
Through some notes' pictures if the others
Were similarly shod. And you could swear

The beautiful nape on the one with short hair
And her strong straight spine, glowing cummerbund
In gold and red and silver embroidery
Was just exquisite going through the curtain.

ELIZABETH SMITHER