

The Witness

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"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

--1 Corinthians 13:1

We used to listen for that clanged door,
but it had never before admitted
a visitor. She came in like a breath,
with a cascade of guards for her escort.
Her coat had caught snowflakes too pale to melt.
She was brittle and tiny and white, flinty
with secrets, like a geode. I saw her
and thought, I want to break her and scatter
her cache of jewels over this prison.
I want to keep her like an ornament,
to look at forever, if not to touch.

But I was not the man she saw. He had
an archangel's face, and knew better
how to catch a soul disposed to mercy.
He sang

and everything moved. Silver dripped
from the walls and pooled in the corners, while
her eyes and the spiders drowned. The music
changed from cymbals to icicles; the notes
hung suspended and reverent around her

like frozen bells never to fall.
We were all transfixed.
I watched something pass over her – then
she knew what to do.

She fitted her hands
through the bars to frame his face, so gently.
I could hear her, as clear as if she had spoken,
tell him of light in the morning, oak rooms,
and the mint smell of her streets. In reply,
he wrapped his fingers hard around her wrists,
and his grip told her all she could know of
chains.

How easily he could have hurt her.
He may have been a prisoner, but his
was the tongue of man. I don't know how, after
what I've seen, I will sleep in this cell tonight.