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AMBER DAWN

THE RINGING BELL

I used to liken a poem to praying. Is that right?
Not the woo and gratitude praying served by queer witches.
Childhood praying. As a girl I genuflected to the tabernacle
and insisted on sitting next to the stained glass window.
On the right kind of Sunday sun would send a slice of pink
light through the glass and down to the porcelain tile floor.
If I reached my hand out, pink light made my fingers glow.
Hand bells rang as padre said hoc est enim corpus meum.
this is my body
I was baptized at four years old, quite late for roman rite. My ma wanted
me to accept god, to be old enough to say it aloud, to initiate myself.
At four, I was old enough to say yes
yes, I receive the light of christ and old enough
to recognize water, candle and cross as reoccuring
symbols, but, developmentally, faith was impossible.
Preschoolers lack an understanding of abstract thought.
In place of abstraction, four year olds are animists.
Everything is alive and has a purpose. Everything
feels and communicates. Nothing is inanimate.
What a marvellous
literally marvellous
stage in cognition.
So then, let's say my four year old self gave the bell
a human tongue, and the bell said never mind your bent knee.
Never mind the padre. The cross, the book, the mass, never mind.
And the bell said hoc est enim corpus meum means
this is my body, but never mind this is my body
because you, child, will spend half a lifetime
wondering if you will ever claim your own body
and wondering if poetry can help you make this claim.
I once read lines of my poetry quoted in the copy of a queer personal ad.
I can only hope the placer of said ad has her desires met and met again.