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Walton's Belshazzar Feast

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Walton's Belshazzar Feast

first concert with my husband since his deafness

by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

When the harpist plays, do you call upon a memory
of harp song? Do you sense the tremulous tones
of the violins and cellos

by the movement of the rosined bows?

You must hear the drum thud, the cymbal clash.

But what about the buzz of the trumpet?

The throaty slide of the trombone?

Does the flute's vibrato

go through the root of you?

Do you depend on the puff of the musicians'

cheeks to know when the woodwinds play,

intuit grace notes by the flautist's quick fingers?

When the tenor sings, are his words obscured

like ancient texts unearthed in deserts?

Do you hear the chorus' held note—the long O

of "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem."

You, here, beside me in your short-sleeved shirt,

leaning forward, face taut.

I touch the flesh beneath your arm,

roll my thumb over your bicep.

O, if I could hear for you.