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Red Hen Press

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What Small Sound

POETRY BY
Francesca Bell

With unwavering tenderness and ferocity, Bell examines the perils and peculiarities of womanhood, motherhood, and our difficult, shared humanity

Francesca Bell's second collection of poems, *What Small Sound*, interrogates what it means to be a mother in a country where there are five times as many guns as children; female in a country where a woman is raped every two minutes; and citizen of a world teeming with iniquities and peril. In poems rich in metaphor and music and unflinching in their gaze, Bell offers us an exacting view of the audiologist's booth and the locked ward as she grapples with the gradual loss of her own hearing and the mental illness spreading its dark wings over her family. This is a book of plentiful sorrows but also of small and sturdy comforts, a book that chronicles the private, lonely life of the body as well as its tender generosities. *What Small Sound* wrestles with some of the broadest, most complicated issues of our time and also with the most fundamental issue of all: love. How it shelters and anchors us. How it breaks us and, ultimately, how it pieces us back together.

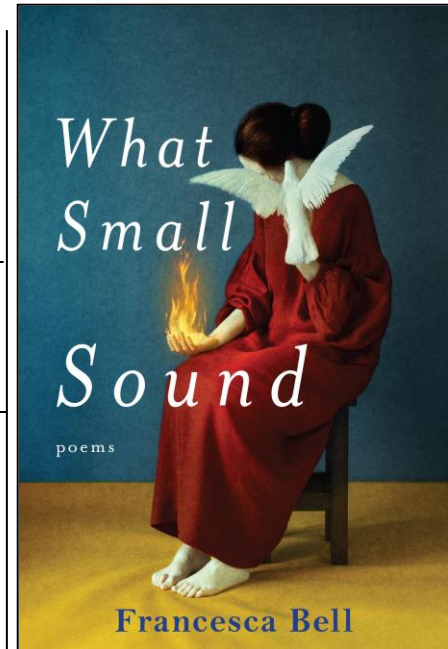
ADVANCE PRAISE

Francesca Bell's poems fish wonder and gratitude and eros from a world brushed by grief and illness and violence. I celebrate this poet's tender commitments to remaining open, especially after loss and even when tragedy triggers an instinct to shelter or retreat. In this way, Bell turns our degrees of separation into songs for contact. The poetic praying found in *What Small Sound* feels like the grace our moment needs.

—**Geffrey Davis**, author of *Night Angler*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francesca Bell is a poet and translator. Her debut collection, *Bright Stain* (Red Hen Press 2019), was a finalist for the Washington State Book Award and the Julie Suk Award. Her work appears widely in literary journals, and she has received a Neil Postman Award for Metaphor from Rattle and an Honorable Mention in *Nimrod's* Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize. Bell grew up in Washington and Idaho and did not complete middle school, high school, or college. She lives with her family in Novato, CA.



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MORE PRAISE FOR *WHAT SMALL SOUND*

Francesca Bell's book *What Small Sound* is gorgeous, raw, and disarmingly honest beginning to end. Her poems encompass the scope of her life, her family's life, plus her generous and empathetic assessment of the larger world. She writes of a struggle to be "normal" in the fiery, broken, unpredictable chaos she sees around her. With skill and passion, she speaks of love, of rape, of deafness, or of holding still for a tarantula, of why she doesn't drink, of who left fingerprints on the bullets of the Las Vegas shooter, or of a mammogram that made her think of the Mars rover. Two quotes of hers from very different poems are unforgettable: "I can't navigate to a life of before / and keep falling face-flat against after." And still: "I want to feel what's next / curled inside me, tight as fists." Read this book. You will keep wanting to find what's after, and you won't forget any of it.

—Susan Terris, author of *Familiar Tense*

FROM *WHAT SMALL SOUND*

What Small Sound

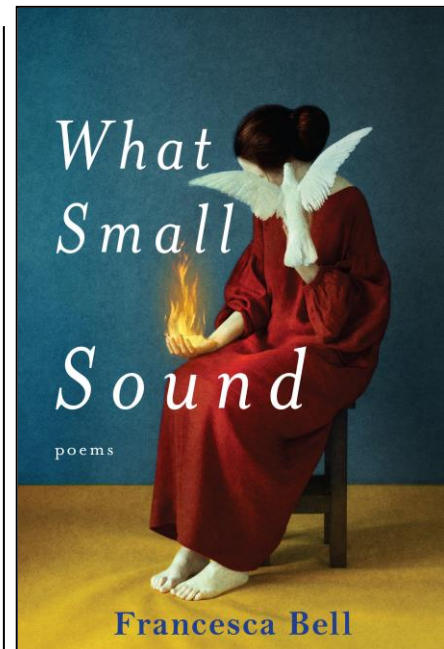
In the audiologist's booth, I clutch the device with the button
I'm to press if I hear a tone, hand clammy, the way
a child holds the finger of an adult she thinks can save her

Behind the one-way glass, my ears are cupped in the pinching
headset, cilia becalmed, the quiet so thick I cannot stop
myself from thinking of Jupiter, its plentiful moons

I'm afraid to look at through the telescope, the stillness out there strong
enough to suck me in. What small sound might those moons make.
spinning in their vacuum, while I sit for what I know is too long

between tones? I'm here to bear witness to this deafness
that expands imperceptibly, the way the universe, they say,
is expanding even as my world narrows, sound swirling round the drain

of this loss. Into the silence of the audiologist's booth
fall consonants, vowels, rain against my windows, my lover's voice
disappearing like a star's light being swallowed and swallowed as it dies,



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