

## **Bells, Bells**

*Portland, Maine, 2018*

The slender baguette of my daily paper slides  
out of its plastic sleeve, another soggy day,  
and the headline reads like a fairy tale,  
*Who's Stealing the Bells?* I wonder

if this is the latest terrorist tactic in Europe,  
perhaps London or Rome, iconic symbols taken  
from cathedrals or even the unknown stone church  
I remember in my Paris neighborhood, the bell calling

the hours and Mass, the sound both startling and  
reassuring. And how I used to imagine Paris bells  
ringing when the Nazi Occupation ended.  
Then I read the missing bells are not church bells,

but ocean bells, buoy bells, "navigational aids,"  
each weighing 225 lbs, not easy things to steal,  
cast in high heat, forged to specific pitch,  
the larger the bell, the deeper the tone, the bronze

an amalgam of what endures, a tempered toughness  
and pure vessel of resonance that carries long past  
its strike action, vibrating out and out.  
Like her voice, I think. Like Aretha.

The Queen of Soul died this week.  
Last night we watched her sing for Pavarotti,  
all of herself given to her art and the release  
of each note, a rare effulgence, now gone.

A map shows me where the bells were here, here,  
here along the coast, nine in all, the empty buoys  
bobbing dangerously silent now without tongues,  
and I imagine boats will soon go adrift in thick fog

to dash on rocks, a sudden splitting of wood,  
the thrash and fist, the drowning  
of cries, the going down,  
down, of a ship, our flagship,

lights sinking, blinking out.  
And did I say Aretha Franklin died this week?  
*Nessun dorma, Nessun dorma*, she sang.  
None shall sleep. None shall sleep.