

# *The Language Creatures*

**Also by Isobel Thrilling**

The Ultrasonics of Snow

Spectrum Shift

The Chemistry of Angels

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**The Language Creatures**

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*To my husband,  
who has given me love and support over many years*





## The Amber Shop

When greyness becomes a wolf at my door,  
I remember the amber shop  
set in the washed-out blues and whites  
of a crumbling east coast town.

Preserved sunlight: the amber is pale lemon  
through to dark cinnamon,  
stored afternoons from cretaceous times,  
ancient radiances made solid  
and carved  
into necklaces, animals and fruit,  
the colours of marmalade  
and butterscotch,  
apricot, mango, gold and peach,  
nasturtium, wallflowers, primrose, ginger.

People absorb its terra-cotta rays,  
surely their blood is charged with fires,  
its essences, its vegetable lamps,  
imprints from antique forests, staves of leaves.

A substance light and almost warm  
to the touch, a living thing  
transmuted with all its sugars and chemistries,  
distillations from sky and earth.  
Who could want gold or other metals  
when they could  
wear this murmurous cargo?

We are all pieces of amber,  
the universe re-made running through our veins.

## The Saxon Lyre

It lay near the sea at Prittlewell  
in a prince's grave  
with the folding-chair and vases,  
armour and sword;

the ghost of a lyre.

Its broken,  
wooden pieces linked by stains  
in the soil  
created the ancient shape,

shadow-music.

Ravens of grief  
still hang  
in the grey and silver landscape.  
Did warriors  
sound the precious metals  
of lament,  
clashing their weapons  
in despair and celebration?

Most touching are the repairs,  
the delicate gold  
and silver  
rivets worked with precision,  
the handmade nails.

Long plank of wood,  
strings joined at one smooth end,  
fanned like  
the wing of a bird,

it preserves  
the reverence of hands.

Reconstructed,  
an echo of shells in the notes,  
once again, it weaves  
its bones into the cadences of men.

## The Singing Bowl

I hadn't known of the Tibetan  
singing bowl;

once told,  
it haunts my head.

Echoes  
from peaks, stars, snows,  
high, sweet blade  
of frost  
or thrum from copper sun  
roll through  
its strung substance,

hollowed stone, spun clay  
or mineral dish  
with shimmer and hum.

A note  
with feathered edges  
like silk  
or full as the moon  
slipping metals into the lake?

Spinets and samisens spill  
along axons,

a lute, a harp, a gong,  
a bell;

cup of sound to hold the world.

## Birth of an Escapologist

This bowl of hyacinths transmits  
a blue pulse,  
scent heavy with thunders,

a bruise,  
a thug at the throat,  
the child is drugged with boredom,  
slugged by sweetness.

The afternoon  
swings its cosh and elderly aunts,  
avid yet powdery,  
flutter their bones, ecstatic  
among the tea-cups,  
sleeves rustle like membranes.

She has lost the power to hear  
their voices,  
just a needle of sound can stab  
the silence  
wound round her head;  
the air wraps her in hot velvet.

She is living a fairy-tale,  
the chrysalis of a child in thrall,  
she must weave  
her own colours, make inner fabric.

Wings of curtains drift over  
this new creature  
assembling its natal flight,  
the skill to release herself to the sky.



## The Language Creatures

Some words are satisfying as good tools,  
those for artefacts,  
terms for things we do.

They give a solid heft on the world,  
we love their grip,  
they help us brew and build and shape.

Other words are tenuous, half-seen  
they glint at parties,  
prowl through committee, business, bank,  
fabled beasts,  
at one with the gryphon, unicorn, gorgon.

Most fearsome is when tongues  
fail completely,  
we sense amorphous wraiths,  
qualms, sensations, terrors  
that carry no title,  
(not fish, nor fowl, nor good, red herring).

Not all are perilous, some flicker  
suspended radiance,  
imprints, intimations beyond  
the reach encoded in genes or neurons.

All language trails the weight  
of a trackless deep,  
where creatures wait to be born, given a name.

## Before Lazarus

Leopard: dark firework undetected  
by the impala,  
slips through ebony, mahogany,  
thick night alive with jasmine.

Invisible lamp:  
brain igniting filaments in nerve  
and tendon, unloosing fibres  
in jaw and paw.

Her leap assembles.

A velvet hunting-equation with  
claws and teeth, a piece  
of physics written in language  
of the cosmos;

the furring of maths.

Such translations, shape-shifts  
in the firmament,  
strange as Greek myths,  
are never perceived as miracles.

Kin to stars, we, too,  
are the old din of the universe.  
Blood, lava, bone and clay evolved

from a chunk of sun,  
we are the planet given a voice,  
clunch of grief and love.

Electrons in stones are the same  
as those in a human head,  
we are sky  
and reassembled time,  
life is a metamorphosis of death.

We were raised from the dead.

## Tracking the Gold Frog

Dusk clings to shoes and clothes  
marooning faces  
to float like balloons,  
footless we come down the hill.

Lizzie picks up trails of leaves,  
collects them like  
footprints from huge, gold frogs.  
Aged three, she does not  
know what tracks the world,  
unicorns are as likely as birds,  
woolly mammoths  
could raise their heads at a zoo.

Medieval chemists never turned  
lead into gold,  
yet the earth achieves a deeper  
alchemy with trees,  
armadillos, nightingales and Lizzie.

We, too, follow tracks in the cosmos,  
astral paths, great beasts of light.  
Angels could flow natural  
as electricity, hidden shoals.  
Deep physics  
with its other dimensions,  
illumines the grain of imagination,

opens space in  
the firmament, where the spirit can go.