

**Wilderness House Literary Review 13/1**

*Ellis Light*

**Birthday Poem**

Sunburn, milk, or vinegar: you're filled with something  
brave and irremovable.

An oak tree hissing with yellow bees –  
Anchoresses, dissidents.

Let no vermilion insect crawl  
on your soft skin.  
So breathe in, bury treasure. Light a light.  
Aloe for contusions, for the laying on of hands.

You were a lonely kid. Now suddenly you're staring  
out the window at your rain-soaked twenties.

Still so hungry,  
but now you have a pantry.

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### Son

They lit a fire in the woods today.  
I heard the crackling from here.  
I tried to empty out the fear,  
Dissolve into a bolt.  
I tunneled far beneath the floorboards.  
A fish in stained glass. Caught fast.

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### St. Dorothy's Pears

My granddad said the pears in his backyard  
were planted by a saint, Saint Dorothy I think.  
He remembers the word for lilacs  
but not what lilacs do.

As the story goes – and it always goes, to hear him tell it –  
goose eggs were buried everywhere, like talismans.  
He found them. Whitestone, New York. The thirties.  
His mother always knew when trouble was outside.

She told a story of her favorite cow,  
her farmer father killed it for her hide.  
The blood ran black and smooth.  
This happened somewhere far away.

His own father was from Canada, had strong arms,  
and wooed his mother with a single poem.  
This is all I know about my family: the poem,  
the saint-blessed pears, the slaughter, and the buried eggs.

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**In the Ville Basse, Luxembourg City**

You once taught me to put my head  
into a fox's mouth.

Where are your daughters? What price for Moselle wine?  
How to make love stay?

A dozen Sundays later I return  
and remember guilt from the eight hundredth page.

The stiffness in my legs at thirty thousand feet.  
The opening of an oyster, I remember that.

You never knew for sure  
If I was a girl or boy. I never told.

Listen to the buses pass below the windows,  
put the questions all in bad française.

Next year I will lose something here  
and have to come back for it.

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### Bird Boy

Two bluejays in a spruce – or maybe three –  
This morning, a red-shouldered hawk in flight.

Months since I started on progestin pills: sixty.  
They eased the pain of periods, so I might  
not miss three days of work a month. Now, three  
weeks until my first testosterone consult.  
I quit the pills five months ago.

The cramps snatch at me with their awful teeth:  
my back, mid-section, and my breasts bound tight.  
The pain is so intense I cannot sleep.  
A rush of starlings whirls and alights,  
veers toward the Catskills, then are gone.

It's up to me to free the bluebird I have felt inside  
my heart for years. Crow's clothes are not for me.  
Nor will I be a phoenix, dying in the night  
and coming back at dawn, dramatically.  
Still, change is coming – fast and soon.

Last week I saw a hermit thrush soar high,  
a dark-eyed junco tasting strange new seeds.

These seem a better metaphor for T.

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### Lullaby for a Door Ajar

If the angel cut the leather  
And the stones could breathe again  
I just know, dear, that wherever there was her  
There'd be a swan

If the seafoam turned to blood  
If the beach screamed out her name  
I would see her, and she'd shiver  
And I'd hold her little hand

If the green axe cut the black tree  
And the gray wolf burned the bed  
We would swallow all our sad words  
And I'd kiss her little head

When we fall into the well  
We will see our old friends there  
Coming to us armed with roses  
And with rubies in their hair

If the road was not so dark here  
If the ghost would close the door  
I would bring her all my treasure  
I'd embrace my sweetest dear