

## Wilderness House Literary Review 21/1

*Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg*  
**For the Love of Plums**

The first fruit I loved beyond nourishment  
fit my child-sized palm perfectly, its weight  
promising the dark rose sweetness of winter  
sunsets although it was high-summer-ready,  
its speckled skin ripe to be broken  
until there was nothing left but the pit.

What did I know then of night and change?  
What did I imagine of opening windows  
in a home over a thousand miles west  
where the wind smelled different  
but the moon winked the same?

I was a child in love with plums  
long before I read William Carlos Williams  
and discovered they tasted even better  
cold and forbidden. I was also enthralled  
by the dark, wind, kittens, staying up late  
to jump on my bed with arms spread wide,  
ready to lift off. And with the twilight  
scent of one good black plum.

I would seek them out all my life  
in the grocery aisle, at the farmer's market,  
from the rare tree where they grew recklessly,  
as if they were infinite as stars or pennies  
in the largely-ignored backyard of a stranger.

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Then I hauled them home, pocketing all I could  
over both my happy hips, setting them  
on the counter to perfect themselves  
until it was time to bite into an exact plum,  
the first beloved manna from a tree,  
what I hope will be the last juice on my lips  
**at the cusp of death, plums knowing things  
beyond what we could ever taste of this world.**

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### On Not Leaving the Animal of My Body

*"IF I SPEAK FOR THE DEAD, I MUST LEAVE  
THIS ANIMAL OF MY BODY...." ~ ILYA KAMINSKY*

So I won't, I can't, speak for the dead because  
the animal of this body lumbers all night  
in that gulp of loss. The way he cracked up  
at the joke I made about how handsome he was  
while putting together the puzzle of what?  
A cafe at dusk in Paris like the one he visited  
long ago or a mossy cottage, fabled in woods  
that spark lightning bugs, like the ones here tonight  
making us forget potatoes rotting underground.

No, I can't leave this lumbering bear of who he was,  
although I hope the animal of his dead body,  
still stands at the lip of the cave, collapses in  
the recliner, or leans on a counter in the kitchen  
of the one he loved enough to keep warm, to feed.

When our friends die, we get so hungry that nothing  
makes sense to eat or say. So sit on the ground,  
dear animal of my body. Don't leave.

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### In the Beginning

There is birdsong  
although we cannot  
see the birds, only  
yellow slips of paper  
jumping leaf to leaf  
where the great sky resides.

There is light too,  
diffuse and ready  
to form into something:  
a cradle to rock, a basket  
to weave, a whiff of jasmine  
to marvel at, a bracelet  
the cat knocks off  
the dresser, glass beads  
percussing the floor.

Wake up. Time to begin again  
even if we don't know  
if beginning is itself a god  
or a fount of folly, a mistake  
or a wall to scale for a new view  
of the old road we know by heart,  
or simply another threshold.

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### Sitting on the Ground in November

The high branch across from you  
becomes an elbow, a nest, an eye hole  
between this old elm and the sun dropping  
its words on the shelf of the west  
until there's no shelf visible.

You bend to palm a pale oval stone,  
stand back up to make out in the charcoal  
of almost-night the fast flash of wings  
that an hour ago could have been a flicker,  
a wren, a crow searching for the next seed,  
perch, or mate when the light makes  
tall shadows of us all.

Now there's a branch of stars, a tree  
caught in the constellation of Cassiopeia.  
What was it you thought you knew  
about the dark and cold?

The moment answers always the same:  
*Pay attention to what gives off  
just enough heat, just enough light.*

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### The Fire Says

The stump says, I was once a great dancer.

The hackberries say, birds going to Mexico.

The windows say, gray stories can light up on occasion.

The two dandelions in the middle of gravel say, sun is crafty.

The metal folding chair says, I mirror the back of you with pleasure.

The parked car says, still rolling.

The tulips say, about time.

The humidity says, time and patience.

The wind says, I'm just an old hobo.

The thinnest branches say, chickadees on time.

The small hole in the ground says, delight in the dark.

The old rocking chair says, time loves us all equally.

The pebbles say, feed us.

The trash bin says, history is a feral illusion.

The fire says, I'll outlive it all.