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Poem on Her Birthday

Ariana Olisvos

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POEM ON HER BIRTHDAY

The pain never stops.

They dress the nurses in a white
like the wings of yachts or angels
to glitter on the insane-blue
sky-and-water-colored walls.

The crabby old woman
turns a crabbed 92.

("She is resting comfortably,"
says a nurse in the hall.)

But she finds rest
nowhere for her distracted eye.

Though I was born on the cusp of the Lion,
I've been Cancerian from birth
and never Leonine . . .

My lust
to have all this all over
drove me (it seems) to grey, straight
out of my black-and-white childhood.

Can she ever have shimmered blonde
a moment in anyone's sight, this old
bitch, old ramblemouth cross-
cunt wrack of a lady?

The nurses, like sails, feed on
distance and glitter more and more as they slip
down the corridor, away, around
the headland out of Port Elizabeth
into the channel of sunlight . . .

I make no more voyages. I lie up
close with the Crab, and lovingly
he nibbles me—now bone and joint,
now teat, now womb, now brain . . .
He'll nibble out my heart.

The pain
never stops. If they tell you it will,
whatever they mean,
they are not your friends.