

Ellen Wright – Two Poems

For Sale: Secretary Desk

*Cautiously used
by a little old lady.*

That would be Great Grandmama
who required looming mahogany
and gargoyle claws poised
to pounce and crush
uniting with drawers
and pigeonholes to protect
bits of lace and twine
and other timidities cowering
behind the writing surface
that hinged shut against them
like a cellar door.

Once part of a fortress
of stolid furnishings
that insulated her against
the tongues of flame
larruping in Grandmama's fireplace
and the scent of oranges and bananas
colonizing the kitchen air
and, most heroically,
against the stinkeye emanating from
Grandmama's gilt-framed portraits
that roiled the house's empty spaces
on behalf of absent menfolk

during the seven years
of Great Grandmama's life
that overlapped mine, when
never once did she venture
out of the room it guarded.

On second thought:

Free to the right owner.
That would be someone
who can steer clear
of its stockpile of forebodings
long enough pry it loose from

its glowering possession
of my office.

Generous reward

to whoever can get past
its vigilance over the seething
emptiness of hallways
and cacophony of staircases
that have got this
quivering apartment surrounded.

Madonna And Child With Fingernails

While I'm chanting the psalms on retreat
at Holy Cross, I don't have to play the organ.
All I have to do is eat and pray and sleep
and let my fingernails grow. I can't stop
looking at them. Can't stop checking the progress

of their development – a habit I acquired
as a toddler when you would clip them
straight across, blunt and stubby, reserving
the graceful almond shape for your own.
My heart would ache when, after your nap

and bath, I watched you prepare
for Daddy's return, replacing daytime
denim with girdle and stockings. Fastening
a brooch at your throat, dabbing a hint of
Muguets des Bois behind each ear. How sweet

the powder puffing from your vanity drawer when
the orange stick, the emery board and that pair
of vicious little scissors emerged to perfect
the ovoid edge of each nail. How magic
the afternoon sun refracting rainbows from

your diamonds onto the brown, hand-me-down rug.
I was so in love. I longed for beautiful nails like
yours. Whenever I was alone in the back yard
I would gnaw the corners off mine hoping
to approximate the shape I coveted. All day

I checked them, refining, with my incisors, any

minute irregularities. I'm grooming them now.
Snipping. Shaping. Examining. Filing.
Praying. Chanting. Consecrating the solitude
of my cell to more filing.

To meditating on the resurrection,
after fifty years' estrangement,
of your perfect image. To contemplating
the parenthetical parings in their blue
saucer on the night table.

Ellen Wright's chapbook, *In Transit*, was published in 2007 by Main Street Rag Publishing Company. Her poetry has since appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *The Ilanot Review* (online), *RHINO* and *Fifth Wednesday*, among others. The recipient of a Master's Degree in Comparative Literature from New York University, she makes her home in Brooklyn and her living as a musician.