

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/4

Asimina Triloba

Sophie P.

Back home, we ate the flesh
Of sour wrinkled fruits.
We celebrated the meat
That stuck in our teeth,
That otherwise rotted
In the cradle of its own roots.

What we harvested from the ground
Split like bitter love and wasted
honey, and green-ish salve
That we rubbed on cuts
From thorns, and whatever else
Your lips would have tasted.

Out of politeness, I offer you
Sweet tea in a tall glass, sweaty
And cold in the humidity. You,
The guest, can only refuse
If you ask for something else that
Was offered already.

You can turn it down initially and
Accept later. Hospitality implores
Me to ignore dismissal and
offer you the best black-ish
pawpaw, cut into neat slices,
You can't find in the stores.

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Back home we pick it
Ourselves, in the summer heat
Or creeping autumn chill.
And when it's offered, you can't
Refuse this; custom implores
That you sit and eat.

Because you are our guest,
I can't send you out the door
Hungry and unsatisfied.
I'll bring you only the best food
And drink; if you finish it
All, I'll bring you some more.

It's only good manners that I follow
you to the porch when you're done.
We can say our good-byes there,
Your hand lingering, until you turn
Away. I watch you go, using my hand
To shield my eyes from the sun.

You didn't understand the play
Of my manners. I tried to explain
To you but you didn't
Want to learn, and I know
You didn't mean to breach etiquette;
You intend no harm, and no pain.

Yesterday you wouldn't come with me
To pick our fruits
Sometimes barefoot, sometimes
Without sunscreen,
Kneeling to pick up the broken
Ones, left to wither in the roots.