

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

Molly Sutton Kiefer
Said to be Safe

The city is said to be safe
 in the bowl
made by mountains.

 Imagine a tornado
climbing *that*.

 Last summer, its hunger
was so big, the trees in her backyard
 shattered,
leaned into one last, lonely sleep.

 Two red-tailed
hawks spoon mice away rest on the last bough.
We watch to see where, among the stars,
 it will green again.

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Pine Barrens

My mother told me my childhood home
was carved by a glacier: I imagined the spring
of mountain-flesh, costumed: first astonished Jell-o,
then sponge, then crumpled, satisfied earth.

My father took me into the woods: three stern paths
to pick from—one which led to the duck pond,
one to raspberries and the river, and one to
the desert, which wasn't a desert at all, not in Chattanooga,
but akin to the northeast pine barrens, the ache
of earth depleted and flame-ready. Even phoenixes and
charcoal beetles long for prairie fire.

I would pretend to be a dune buggy, steering through
the dwarfed Christmas trees, drag my feet in the soft sand,
leaving a lingering, rising up, telling my story in hieroglyph.

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Cecropia

The landlord has noticed the coffee table on my porch,
has asked its hasty removal; you dismember it
with a buzzing yellow drill.

The crack open of a beer beneath spring's first
real sun, you and Owen stand on the porch as two men do,
discussing the minutiae of biology—the curve
of her hips under billowing skirts, the shape
of my container garden.

Beneath the tabletop is a brown cocoon. Instinctively,
we three step back, not knowing if a hornet
or bee will fly out at us. She steps close—
In the window, the shadow of skirt,
dusty like moth's wings.

Penelope tells us, she knows—
this is a cecropia cocoon; the moth inside is attracted
to the crab apple trees in our front yard.

She attempts to pry away a piece of its papery layer
to show us its shape—brilliant rust, deep black, but this clever moth
has maintained its shelter. We debate where to put it now;
it cannot follow the wasted coffee table to the dumpster.

Cradling cocoon like child, we decide to tuck it
between concrete and brick, away from the bickering squirrels
and birds. We must protect this fruit from the hunt.

Inside, I realize, there is a secret language
between Penny and Owen—periodic tables
and lab notes. She tells me patiently
how grasshoppers listen: ear drums

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on their ropey legs and Owen cries out,
I can hear you, I can hear you! Swings his calf
against her thigh, her cotton skirt rising.
They laugh at this joke; I am outside
on the other side of the room.

Later that night, Penny and Owen will share a bottle of cheap
red wine. They will fade into the background
of the kitchen, she in his lap, crooning in his ear.

Murmuring while she sweeps back hair from forehead,
they have become lost in the folds of the sweet night.

You and I go quietly, leaving them swathed on the futon,
knowing she is too drunk to stay awake and he is too kind
to do anything but fill pint glass after pint glass
with hazy water from the tap.

She tells us the cecropia hatches from its velvet cocoon,
it will only live a week or two perhaps,
mate furiously in the small hours and die
without ever tasting the crabapple tree again.

You and I know they were never
this way, that instead, the cecropia flutter
away on paper wings, become old and weary,
know every lusty apple will bear fruit.