

ASA DRAKE

My Mother Has Two Ways of Giving Permission

Through one she says, "I want you to be happy." Through the other she tells an anecdote from her own life.

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I need to be generous to flowers to be generous to animals.

At least forty minutes a day to water flowers. At least twenty minutes to seek out giant silk pods
shed by the imperial moths of North America.

A friend has started a new job. I check in to see whether the change is a happy change.
Of course this is my surrogate confession.

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There's a history of America in which cultivation demonstrates ownership then there's a history of America
where cultivation indicates foreign aesthetic a deviation from the imported European lawn.

A friend calls. She's found a house in my price range in her nearby city. I tell her I don't think municipal boundaries offer safety. We both live in Florida, but she lives in a *blue* county and I live in a *red* county. She's four weeks pregnant and receives prenatal care in a different state. When she found out, she told me, "It's not too late for us to raise kids together."

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Saturdays, we stroll through the garden center and discuss resiliency. A city south of us has cut down all residential orange trees to deter commercial citrus greening. (Lemons and kumquats and pomelos, I'm here for you!) What's most like the orange blossom, next to the orange blossom?

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Both overwhelmed by the good things about to happen for me and unsatisfied.

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Frank Barbour Coffin writes, "We must be militant here on earth, militant against every form of error." I'm reading his 1897 introduction through a friend's curation. Militant

but not militaristic. Not a tactic of war.
Combative and attentive like false eyes on the polyphemus moth.
I stopped climbing trees because of my poor eyesight. Before grade school's diagnostic tests,
I reached for a branch secured my hand on a larva's silky body.
I couldn't tell by sight where the sweetgum bark was occupied. This didn't give me a gentle touch.

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A difficult client avoids me because she thinks I'm foreign. Another seeks me out
because she misses the occupation of Dutch Indonesia. (After Independence, she left her favorite servant
a pair of kittens. She asks whether I will give them back now.) A coworker saves perfumed pages from the periodicals
after I tell her I want to smell something new. One sample claims to be a configuration of carrots wrapped in linen.

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In the evening I usher patrons out of the building wearing three fingers of cloth over my shoulders instead of two,
arranging my hair to read as racially ambiguous.
Silk moths of North America are the size of my hand and have wings like fall leaves.
Ornamentation, of course, is a distraction. That's the best way to survive.