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Sleeping in the Light

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SLEEPING IN THE LIGHT

Summer nights in the street under the arc light,
I throw rocks high in the air,
watch the bats follow them down,
just missing the ground before swooping up
and barrel rolling back into dark.
My missiles shoot through a Milky Way
of fluttering millers in the lamp's cone.
I wonder why night creatures struggle
to reach the light, become willing food
for dive-bombing ghosts, who hang
dawn to dusk in the rafters of our garage.
If moths love the light, why aren't they
out when the sun burns bright?

Each morning I do a miller body count.
Gypsy moths litter the ground
around the pole—petals of dying
poppies. I finger their fern-like antennas,
rub the dust of their color into my skin,
then climb on the garage work bench,
pull myself up into the rough-plank loft above.
Moths scaled like an Indian warrior,
I peer at the coffins (black-caped
cocoon) and hum the miller's song.
The bats panic, unfurl, tumble-wing
into the open confusion of daylight—
darting behind the shed into dense
cover of chokecherry shade.

I shot one (with my brother's air rifle)
caught it trespassing in our garage. I nudged
the small bundle with the gun barrel,
peeled open its arms (like two
cabbage leaves) revealed tiny
arms, ears, a hairy torso,
its bald little monkey face—
nothing pernicious—a puppy with wings.
Still, nights I watch the bats
hunt the millers. No stones.
It seems right to let them fly, do their dance,
looping in circles through golden light—
where the priest said my grandpa had gone last
Christmas because he was old, sick, and all
tuckered out, couldn't eat
milk-toast or drink whiskey anymore.