Spring 2020

Heaven is a Hot Tub

Charlotte Catherine Foreman
Bard College, cf9020@bard.edu

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Heaven is a Hot Tub

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by
Charlotte Foreman

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To Josie, if it wasn’t already obvious –
Table of Contents

Preface ................................................................................................................................. 9
The canoes clamor down the gauze of the river .............................................................. 10
  we have come to people the way out................................................................................. 11
  The Open Plain................................................................................................................. 12
  The Royal Poinciana Hotel............................................................................................ 13
  Peace River...................................................................................................................... 14
  Wolf Lake....................................................................................................................... 16
  Beyond the Citgo............................................................................................................. 17
Six fine trout leap into the row boat ................................................................................. 18
  Shark Valley................................................................................................................... 19
  Attempting to Reach Julia Tuttle’s Mansion in Miami by Canoe................................. 20
  The Rainbow Snake...................................................................................................... 22
  The Swamp Bandits...................................................................................................... 24
  The mangrove tunnels on the coast shift...................................................................... 25
Money was the main thing ................................................................................................. 26
I live where you vacation ................................................................................................. 28
  American Dong............................................................................................................. 29
  I live where you vacation............................................................................................ 31
  North Captiva............................................................................................................... 32
  We Stashed the Honda & Went for a Swim................................................................. 33
  Bliss Soup...................................................................................................................... 34
Heaven is a hot tub ........................................................................................................... 35
  that thing we call day.................................................................................................. 36
  Heaven is a hot tub...................................................................................................... 38
  a$ap rocky says.......................................................................................................... 39
  Neither Leaving Here Nor Going There..................................................................... 40
  Lady’s Slipper.............................................................................................................. 41
Cowbone Marsh ............................................................................................................... 42
  The debutantes are like doves.................................................................................... 43
  The Sugar Factory...................................................................................................... 44
Not saints but always pupils
pupils dilated fully black in full achievement of

– Alice Notley

And drunk with my madness, I shouted down at them furiously: ‘Make life beautiful! Make life beautiful!’

– Charles Baudelaire
If it’s not all juxtaposition, she asked, what is the binding agent?

– Forrest Gander

A lot of people don’t know that most of what America considers “Florida” – the tri-county area of Miami-Dade, Broward, & Palm Beach – was underwater before it was developed. The unadulterated marshland of the Everglades flooded everything south of Orlando. On some days, so many wading birds crowded the air above that you couldn’t even see the sky. Journals from Everglades reconnaissance missions recount “a great plenty of cockodrills,” up to twenty feet in length. Fast forward about a century, & half of the marsh has been drained with the help of dredges, levees, & thousands of miles of canals. Fort Lauderdale is the spring break Mecca of America & Miami is as glamorous as ever, with its colossal royal palms & Art Deco, its speedboats & Rolls Royces on South Beach. 90% of the wading birds are gone, but the snowbirds from the northeast, biding out retirement on the beach, have replaced them.

Florida lies in the deep south, with its antebellum houses, matronly willows & small-town Walmarts. It’s just as ugly, too: the “Dixie Highway” that runs through the wealthiest parts of West Palm Beach – not far from Mar-a-Lago – smacks of Jim Crow in any given part of the state, Confederate flags wave off semis & Ford F-150s. The seemingly arbitrary, one-foot wall on the edge of the housing projects in Liberty City is actually what remains of an eight-foot, cement “race wall” – still standing. The strange thing is, the longer you travel down the coast on I-95 towards Miami, the more it becomes a kind of hot northeast, a melting pot of people & politics. Of cafecitos & health food stores, of Jai Alai & luxury apartments, yoga studios & Bernie stickers. It’s as if someone cramped all of America into one, long, hot state & set the birds free.

This January, my sister turned twenty-seven. We drove three hours west into the swamp, and camped on Peace River, just the two of us. The river runs through the sleepy town of Arcadia, tucked in among hundreds of miles of orange groves. We drank whiskey & apple juice as the sun came down & gators sunned themselves on the banks of the river. Chains of Spanish moss swung in the wind on oak limbs above us & kids on dirt bikes ripped down the sandy byroads of the campground. In a journal documenting his exploration of the St. John’s River & East Florida, American naturalist William Bartram writes, “...being placed so near the great savanna, the attention is quickly drawn off, and wholly engaged in the contemplation of the unlimited, varied, and truly astonishing native wild scenes of landscape and perspective, there exhibited: how is the mind agitated and bewildered, at being thus, as it were, placed on the borders of a new world!” Indeed, to travel through Florida is to discover a different world, each mile you pass through it. With my notebook & loved ones in the car, I set out into the drained marsh prairies of America’s problem child, to try to understand how she came to be.
The canoes clamor down the gauze of the river
we have come to people the way out

in celebration where the rivers kiss

& shimmer with depth

pretty brutal on bog water

some ecstasies are obvious –

glamorous luster

as rain thrashes around the cypresses

& each deafening time

we pretend to be brave

on the killing floor

the muscle between

the dream & the real

contracts

a dark spasm of space

& airboat noise

wise to the light

we ought to give
The Open Plain

Opium of sun on the highway vista.
In the distance, the sugar mill hoods
Lake Okeechobee in ash.

Confederate flags laze off eighteen-wheelers.
Trucks of Brangus bulls, winter tomatoes
from Immokalee.

Landfills exhale in the heat.
Passing through Arcadia, boxcars
of oranges draw past a schoolhouse.

The new CVS, the Eli’s Western Wear.
Aisles of cow whips, headstalls, & tie downs.
Over unders, halters & leads.

As the sun falls, mounds of orange & blue
come down over the outlet malls.
Halogen lights bleach the county prison.

Razor wire flashing in the spike rush.
The slit in the moon removes us.
In that endless pattern,

Earth’s ruthlessness revealed –
a divot in paradise.
So tolls the bell of tenderness, willowlke.
The Royal Poinciana Hotel

It began during the Great Freeze, when
Julia Tuttle sent that orange blossom
to Henry Flagler as evidence
Miami had been spared the cold
Edenic possibility in its sunned ferns

Napoleon Bonaparte Broward
dredged up the shoal grass
to drain the flood plains
& make our being here possible
without a daily slog through swamp

Instead drinking the dew
off white birds of paradise
banana leaves & self-cleaning
Christmas Palms – a kind of
jungle champagne

Flagler’s estate in the paludal bed
writhing with snakes & wading birds
alligator nests churn, palms stir the sky
this watery-world-turned-lunch-date
with teacup terriers & Gucci loafers

A paradise of citrus & tanagers
situated between myth & luxury –
a bypass hole. The idea you could
rise in the cypress dome & call it
the returns of good faith

Call it your own, as the anhingas
& night herons fan out, bull frogs
murmur in the scrub & rat snakes
flush the buttresses of tree stands,
the world so ceaseless in the silver rain.
Peace River

The canoes clamor down the gauze of the river
that reproduces itself through miles of orange groves
boys in wifebeaters strike oar against gunwale
to spook the gators out of their torpor

we sign waivers to enter the gamble space
of the jurassic & evade our paradisiacal blunders
mid-huff in the backseat in Gainesville
the hours of life left in us at Flanigan’s lunch

Lil Uzi Vert blares down the beauty pit
as cloud bodies divide light
vast panes bend over horse country
astonish us out of reason

snakes draped in cypress limbs
mime chains of Spanish moss
dragging currents through the water
as they sway with the ancient wind

ankle-deep in wavelet sequence, sister and I
watch the dusk glister through the river
an alchemy unwinding
beneath the constantly-renewed stars

drawl of horses, drawl of dew
the yells of children in the near dark
hot, golden dawns – worlds
resolve themselves in the river bed

the choir of crawdads
loose in the leafy algebra
blonde stalks of forever
over the snake bone highways
I hear you, pinnately
in the halcyon barrel of elapsed muscle
wading the stream gradient
wind in the jasmine

it’s just you - light’s rennet
splicing pillars in the atmosphere
as columns of smoke
rise up off the river grass
Wolf Lake

Marissa had the idea that we could be sisters in some place boys couldn’t hurt us. Maybe across town, at Wolf Lake, where plant stems bend up the marsh prairie & all the teenagers smoke spliffs in the shade of Australian pines. We’d jump the fence in the moonlight to lie in the grass with starved cattle. Occasionally, the farmer would wave his Remington from a trailer in among some willows. We’d let the beauty polish of the rain carry us home, where the ranch houses dozed beneath the gowns of oaks. Rumor has it, after a particularly nasty fight with her boyfriend, the town councilman’s daughter overdosed & drowned near the mythic, sunk sedan. The horse she rode in on, it thrashed through the power lines, it whinnied & died.
Beyond the Citgo

You came scrying into my life, as if, by some fabular circumstance, you could guess the trajectory of the junebugs through the swamp grass.

That some celestial Bingo might find us frying up summer squash in the dark.

I loved what badness looked like: to do lines beneath a crayoned sun, to turn up the mire, sucking you off in the Suwannee. Bobcats slink beneath the highway as we magnetize to the hum of the gas lamps, a taste of metal in our throats. We accrue freckles as the sun jams through cypress leaves, those windows holding the absurd cloth of days we had not yet curved pitch with the dream knife. How we two kids became one in the genius of wild lime. Were we to startle God’s design from the sedge, we might be able to fathom the intent of his large demand. Spilling the deer from the copse, drawing the swans out of their nests.
if you dare walk into
the sunny parts of heaven
you will hear a buzz so loud
as to make you think

– Bernadette Mayer

Six fine trout leap into the row boat
Attempting to Reach Julia Tuttle’s Mansion in Miami by Canoe

(italicized portions drawn from James Ingraham’s Diary of an Exploration Trip through the Everglades, 1923)

Six fine trout leap into the row boat
as we pass through the portages
setting fire to the sawgrass
to clear pathways for our advance

The myrtle & willow bushes
tower above us in the swamp basin
& alligator eyes pierce the water
as they spy a pliable target

Mid-death roll, whipping
around their body axis, tearing
the limbs of prey from this world
downward into the spike-rush

Gar ream the bloody sedge
to bore tunnels through the morass
wading somnambulantly
under the red sun

Smoke envelops:
but for the bayou
in which I stood
would have burned me up

A native woman laughs
when we ask her how long to Miami
eleven days for the white man
& two for the native

We slog rations of hominy
cold coffee for bogging
as the sun beats down
on miles of marsh prairie
A panther bakes in the brush
deaf of rainfall mercury
the summer thunderstorms scattered
from heavy industry out back

Left from nights of turtle soup
mounds of terrapin shells
form islands in the sedge
snook dart around the alligator lilies

We stop to rest in the mud
near a moccasin nest
ripping apart deer jerky
in the mantic dark

Egrets blanch the old lemon groves
one man sleeps on the hole
to keep the snakes in, all quiet
but for the palms thrashing in the wind.
Shark Valley

every day of wet season
thunderheads gore light

my heart an egret bowl

elephants raid the baobab
while vicissitudes of moon

flood the swamp parallels

in the galleon of abalone
fiddler crabs shimmy

a vigil from leaf litter

the python a prize
from the rubber tree

not less because its threat

clusters in the loon
tub as in limestone

the years pile
The Rainbow Snake

that night at the show Bugsy’s mutt threaded around Michael’s legs
none of us had ever heard of a rainbow snake we assumed it was the cough syrup talking
he said Connor had pulled into the Marathon to fill up the van & he slid out to pee in the bushes
the hot, May rain glistened beneath sodium-vapor lamps & there
the whip, blue-black
iridescent
streaks of yellow & red so bright he almost mistook it for stray caution tape
it slipped across the road and into the shoal grass
a mythic ribbon into the hinterland
the kind of snake he’d thought he’d seen
hasn’t been recorded since 1952 it’s thought to be extinct
the rarest snake in America
lying in bed tonight
I love the idea his deluded system had dreamt up such a creature
like OJ spilling out the Bronco door it didn’t matter if it was true
what matters is the permission we give ourselves to be shocked
each time weird articulations of a vanished god arrive
like fish rising up out of the canal so dark at night
hard to even know what you’re looking at
when surprise can have any valence – positive, negative, neutral
at the virtual birthday party I unearth this common fossil from the weedbed:

we all inhabit the error of the bird margin, climbing into life with sea-legs

even Kim Jong Un is in a vegetative state

even Kim Jong Un is dead & the secret bodies of Andover startle me from the laundry

& today is significant because these versions of us will expire

what are your coping mechanisms for when you feel feral and alone

I have no idea for my days are but breath
The Swamp Bandits

Driving down Alligator Alley towards the Miccosukee Casino & Seminole Bingo, alternations of the wind sweep the slough,

Heaving up trailer lore of 1920’s gladesmen – the Ashley Gang robbing banks & rum-running from Bimini to the Jupiter Inlet.

“Queen of the Everglades,” Little Laura Upthegrove wears a billowing white dress, a .38 revolver strapped to her waist

As she disappears into the drainage scrub in a Model 30 at the mercy of gators and hogs. In palmetto thickets

Shaded with banana leaves, she tends the whiskey stills, obliging hordes of mosquitoes to drink freely from her.

John Ashley is under suspicion of murder – Desoto Tiger found dead on a dredging site near Okeechobee.

Police cars idle in the dust on the swamp perimeter, unaccustomed to the wild peregrinations of cracker cowboys.

Shootout: a bullet ricochets off a car window, Ashley’s jailed & fitted with a glass eye. Feigns good intent & released

For road repair. He slips back into the primordial order of the swamp, the murmurations of birds so thick

They preclude the afternoon sky. Those dead legends haunt the drained Tamiami– construction’s gory aftermath

Where miles of canals & levees construct the brackish edge of paradise,

All Heaven’s questions resolved then & there in the muggy afterlife.
The mangrove tunnels on the coast shift

rework themselves until they unravel

become striated arrows into the salt marsh

a year is a slot in oolitic limestone

holding surface areas of white because they are so recent

once thawed, ice releases its ability to give back in albedo

something big inside you upon knowing it; miracle = fact, as Levertov would have it

I had a strange feeling I was somehow past death

geographically speaking
Money was the main thing
Money was the main thing. That the lobstermen ran out of work & bad boat loans to pay off, that young anglos dreamed of Rolexes as much as Colombian kingpins needed gringo expertise. Miami was merely a convenience – like a long finger, reaching into the subtropical latitudes, where the tentacles of the Medellin cartel splayed out & raged through the hemisphere. Thousands of unused airstrips welcomed the bustle of prop planes skirting the radar net at the border, and the Everglades’ cryptic mire obscured recruits as they trained for guerilla warfare in slash pines and fetterbush. Our saga begins with the Falcon Brothers – Taby and Willie – who, more inclined to the celebrity & thrill of speedboat racing, dropped out of high school to begin their family business in a kind of “retail.” Whipping through the Caribbean, beneath false decks, they hauled cocaine from the Bahamas to the shores of South Florida. Operations took off, freighters docking at Port Miami with metric tons of the stuff hidden in fiberglass yams. Planes flew in covertly, about eighty an evening, to unload whole bales in the dark scrub. Their friend Sal kept meticulous accounting, his transaction ledgers the only way of knowing how much was being moved beyond the seized cargo. According to him, Mickey Munday was making 2.5 million a trip to fly product in & the Federal Reserve said, one year, the currency surpluses totalled near $5 billion. Coin-O-Wash banks opened to launder what drug lords couldn’t spend living lavishly at The Mutiny hotel & leasing mansions with cash. Business was a delicious threat beneath the sago palms – deals arranged al fresco, over lunches of mackerel and rice. But all those narcobucks didn’t come without a cost; you wouldn’t believe the hot copy lawlessness of those cowboys with Uzis, all of breakfast’s lies turned truth by evening. Homicide upsurge so bad, the medical examiner once rented a Burger King truck to hold the morgue overflow. They’d find bodies floating amongst the yachts on Miami River like Dixie cups. Customs couldn’t keep up: “What we do is basically react,” the agent said. In the Florida Keys, they burned tons of seized cargo in agricultural incinerators. In Miami, they burned it in the generators of the Florida Power & Light Corporation. Each day a new hustle, the start of death inextricable from the peak of ecstasy, which wreaked havoc on God’s waiting room, where seniors would cash out Social Security checks & stake plastic flamingos out by the mailbox. Eventually, the nights of machine gun chatter grew quiet, as cops flushed the Miami International Airport with canines & cable networks televised the scandal. Magic City returned to stasis as a hot purgatory between mayhem & mundanity, the surf pounding reliably as ever, while sundry shops on South Beach peddled sex wax & g-strings. The glitz of bloodied tropics filled the resorts carved into drained marshland & every March, spring breakers overflowed the Elbo Room beach bar in Fort Lauderdale. Out west in cow country, Walmarts cropped up like weeds, semis roasted on dirt highways & after the long haul, those swamp cowboys unwound in front of their TV sets, waiting, as they always did, for their mules to arrive with a fix.
It’s the tropics, everyone goes to pieces in the tropics!

– *Where the Boys Are* (1960)

I live where you vacation
American Dong

By the bridge extending over Pidgeon Key / redheaded Bridgette from Lake Worth / on the bow of an ‘18 Cigarette Marauder / writhes to Diplo

in alligator leather / whipping out of the irruptive sun / body horror of the frat house / it fucks us into fervor / and glimpses of pure heat

sweating, snorting certain veterinary dissociative anesthetics / we fall back on pool floats / jerk out the autopic / our attention to day smears / floating

sea-green & face-up / watching the diurnal rhythms of birds unfold Connecticut Kristen tells us how she totalled her Lexus / barred out in the Whole Foods parking lot like Selena Gomez in Spring Breakers we’re messing around in striated wealth / full of incomplete and flashing colors / we pass through the tunnel beneath the airport runway / sodium floodlights glisten on the roofs of taxi cabs / a moon on the waterless wade-space / where it’s cruise day / ever since we started getting tattoos our boomer neighbors have been telling my sister and me about the holy eternal / meanwhile, Miami Subs’ neon pink circuitry snaps the back off the batshit motel / eating boneless wings under fluorescent lights really nice day / sitting on your lap in the anthropocene / Gucci Mane screams into limpid night / new every moment the body reconstitutes itself

& on the roof of the hotel palms inflate around us / bird clades inflect a sense of doom over distant barges / somatic bursts of martyrdom

in the nacreous dark / do my death a favor & insert your love in my effortless procedure / where manatees doze under black water

in the no-wake zone of the boat show / Spicer says any fool can get into an ocean / while in chain restaurants we surrender ourselves
to the ways we fail / succumb to a generic life in plastic patio chairs / truth is, dolphins are really very violent / & Miami will flood everyday at high tide by 2050 / we are so drastically twenty-two / chasing peacocks off the roof / staying lachrymose at happy hour / jonesing for the ultimate disco playlist / we find joie de vivre in our “rich inner worlds” succumbing to vacation haruspicy / beneath beach bar string lights & swing of moon / approximations of the waves fill conch carcasses with life / when we bring them to our ears & listen the sound of the ocean weakens the binds of daily obligation / & when we drive back from Homestead / mamey sapote on our hands sweet & sticky the undulating pulse of sundown beats upon the strip malls & King Cones / if I could obscure you from wave action & the harebrained philosophy of personhood / we might both be able to stay good & occupied as the climate ends / & the buildings swim us all away
I live where you vacation

working on a new business model
where people give me money to watch me work
my fingers beneath the skin of the ripest mangoes
& eat them with my hands, sucking on
the stone, juice running down my wrists
& onto the soft flesh that wraps around,
neaped in the cotton of my grade school gym shorts
North Captiva

Mom found the island in a magazine. Every year after that, we would put a few pounds of cheese, bread, & some burger meat on a boat & go live on the beach for a week. North Captiva was the same paradise every spring – the traffic of land tortoises on gravel roads, the sun cooking the kayakers, lilac & teal beach rentals where we’d watch *Saturday Night Fever* on VCR or string seashells into mobiles. Each night, we bounded through the tidal flats of the inlet Hurricane Charley had cut as the sun splashed down. Playing in the surf, we were at the whim of the world. I remember bringing the dying bird seashells of water to drink. I remember the helicopter that flew in for the woman with an urchin in her foot, & one morning, golf cart patrol outside a shuttered house after a suicide. As the years passed & we grew older, we stopped going as frequently, & then not at all. After the hurricane, we returned to the island to pay our respects. The abandoned stilt houses genuflected to the tide, which had culled in the shore by hundreds of yards. Raccoons pillaged dumpsters of debris for fast food wrappers. Walking along the beach, there were no kayakers, no sunset picnics. The mammalian whip of the gulf flayed the sand.
We Stashed the Honda & Went for a Swim

Fourth of July, we’re back in Pompano
where my glasses get fogged up & all
my clothes smell like a warm bath
fireworks scintillate every city
down the coast from
Deerfield to Miami
hash up the night sky
before they vanish
into the dark channel
like the sun on those
puddles of stars in the
glitter factory parking lot
I digress through fistfuls of light
tossed out on the cerebral water
a brine-child in the earth’s turned waves
everything comes to rest through circle & gyre
& all night long in the fish-filled waters you take your
fill as the cruise ships plunge towards paradise & back again
Bliss Soup

Glint orchids on the prelogical
  water archive / those sluiced stars
wise as the songs / of the cowrie shell
  mobile / jellyfish effluent issues
from the wave service / the walls of day
  unspooling their fiberglass / invisible bliss
precedes emergency / subdues the rattle
  of the myth jalopy / all day long we edge
towards understanding / grace of an island
  being not its breeze / or atavistic blue / but the fact
of its real tenderness / our purpose
  in this life / it sent us swimming / a whole
universe scintillating beneath in bushels
  of agate / we arrive to shift & rework
ourselves / under the pullulating sun.
O love,
where are you
leading
me now?

– Robert Kelly

Heaven is a hot tub
that thing we call day

Josie & I fuck around / in the Plantation punk squat / wiping our noses on the surface of the sun / micro-moments of island time
tender us nearer death’s impossibility / smoking blunts on the balcony as waterfowl thrash in the banana trees below / our makeshift timeshare sits empty in a limbo / of ambien residue & hair bleach / Josie & I in days outside necessity / embark in a bliss of hours / slung loose behind the bathroom door / Michael sleeping / his hair makes a wet nest in the 3 p.m. light / Delsym patterns keep us awake / wandering without conclusion / through the hot totality / we cut lines & climb across the order beyond order / knocking of spoon against dish / a conversation of angels / as the sun rises I flirt with you / & empty the yellowtail our desires welling up like cypress knees in rivers too shallow to swim in for fear the alligators will eat us up / we lie along the river’s edge & spring back renewed / the water glistens around us / afternoon comes
with its half-shaded plantains / my love has always been yours / I couldn’t
give you enough if I tried / always we must reach around ourselves
to touch each other / I hold you as you dream / I gather
those parts of you / made blonde by sunlight
Heaven is a hot tub

Heaven is a hot tub Josie says
& I agree to slide light in the whirl
of the blue bathroom she shoots up in

I’m moved to remember her eyes
from the abject boscage
so braced into that system of elision

nodding as the sun dips
like wild horses swim
in the heat of private devotion

the clouds trap & release
shadows in the sand
topping off at the Marathon

light through my fingers
as I shield my eyes from sun

watching the surf remember itself
again & again
in the nacreous eiderdown of day
a$ap rocky says

fukk
sleep

a$ap says
it’s okay

the hosts
of night

dashed into
sportive aether

as brute
creation

roasts
the grasses

& lilies
of the swale

our bodies
framed

in rock doves
bound

to the doom
of the haze
Neither Leaving Here Nor Going There

I float on the jewel pool
drink Jai-Alais, shiver

in the dark understory
of mango trees.

The swamp chants, ancient doors
open the knowledge bed

from which gazes arise.
Frogs croak as snakes

slipping through a peat bath
kiss upside down

the rumored mamey
of the heart.

The blood of marsh rabbits
rules the floor

& old moon spills
her sophistry.
Lady’s Slipper

where the serpent’s spirit falls
in evening’s bath of violet
a bird alights on the lustrous bog
vibrating the orchid castle in the reedbed

jellyfish coruscate
around a box turtle
shapeshifting, while
solution holes hum with marl

in early morning, someone
at the water park
turns the pumps on
ushering the flood down
in fistfulls of snowy plover

we renew each day
in our plush lagoon
cramped with tankinis
& whippoorwills
Fill your black hull
with white moonlight.

There will never be an end
to this droning of the surf.

– Wallace Stevens

Cowbone Marsh
The debutantes are like doves

when you were born / in a passive red sluice

some hot providence asked the palms to move

Heaven’s ferns peeled back / to give you an orange

from the groves of Orlando / light flooded the tidal

marshes / in a place south-er than south / afternoon

sun presses through Spanish moss / I don heels

from Kohl’s / a baby blue dress / become a woman

in the community center / all these lives around me
Cowbone Marsh pools up inside me through the hallways of cypresses on Fisheating Creek. Thunderheads move over the dark grasses that sway in incomprehensible concert, carving patterns in the air above the peat.

We paddle over an alligator nest as wind tambourines the river & black eyes gore the water like root knobs – a prehistoric trick.

The rhizomatic groves release us from the grip of logic, this swamp a hoop, expanding & contracting with the force pushed against it. Melaleucas on the banks sleep through the oar clang, bare-boughed & brown.
In Clewiston, a woman in blue lace
is drinking a Fanta at reception.
She tells us the Inn restaurant
has been closed six years now
with no foreseen reopening.

We drive through the Git ’N Go
for Doritos & blue Gatorade
the rhythmic buildup of the uncanny
smeared all over our little hot faces.
The Bog Calculator

Bathing in the Suwannee, the river courses
with numbers & bird bones. Divine algorithms
in the ferns move the cloud array above, networking
the systems of alligators. They wed the hardwood hammock
to the horseshoe crab – a perfect economy of real estate – & fasten
instinct to animal, that cattle might hunker down in anticipation of the rain.
To become animal is to participate in the overlap of self & world, to integrate.
Wavelets echo round your torso as you wade through, bringing the circuits
of snakes to a boil, as kids from Homosassa kick up sugar sand on ATVs,
disappear in the mess of marsh. Beneath the stars, a lynx stalks
through the accidental Bible swarm, past the turnpike Arby’s,
the gas station in Jasper. In the morning, vultures
hold vigil over the night’s carrion. The trailers
stir awake. I put the coffee on
& watch the girls eat.
God & Country

He baits a wire trap with a whole chicken & climbs down to set it in the muck of the basin. Prodding the hole with a hunting rod, he feels around the gathering. The gators are roused from their slumber in the dank grass. Something beyond the imagination heaves, deep in the earth: No feeling in the world like when that rod slides along the gator’s back. He jabs it nearer the raw fowl & into the mouth of the cage – the door slams shut. For raw sport, the hunter upheaves the animal from the land of unbridled inundation, of shells & dissolved vegetables, & tows it to nearby tourist attractions. He follows the procedure each time demand calls to see the local gore, to witness the bounds of prelapsarian fury. Barebacking the beast at Gatorland, the patrons revel in what they can’t control. He lets them hold its jaw closed in their hands. It doesn’t feel ire anymore; only the weight of the sky above, the sting of gravel at its core.
Don’t Tread on Me

O shibboleth daddy
I am no fool

I smoke out the Swamp Ape
His gown of red hair his myriad monikers

O Swampsquatch O Cabbage Man

Feed me your weird jabber
Your 90s your UFO your Monika Lewinsky

I trap Castro in a sea shell I glue you to your television

& when the vault of Heaven rips
& the returns of God’s fury
rain down in black ash

I’ll be waiting with Bible & glock
to cure the marred sun
Hear the wind outside
The bloody shell of your life.

– Jack Spicer

canada makes a daybed
the skimmer basket

& when we hopped the fence to the Parc Court pool / the light scrambled on the surface of the water / I knew we had entered the suburban sublime / stoned we skinned our knees / fucking in the jacuzzi / I look you in the eyes / it’s easy / for once everything resolved / in the bassy arms of Kodak / we vibe dissociation loops of water / vamping gently against us with a glock in your hand / you bore a hole in the death lagoon / the marine air purple & heavy / to love you is to shotgun the loss box / is to fuck around the dream girdle drinking Yuenglings in Flipp’s bed / when the 808 drops impossible horses wild with heat / on the ocean floor the pearls fan out / you choke me on that tension mat
people tell me sometimes i’m a deer sometimes

the sugarcane makes a daybed flanking US 27
shards of limestone slice our ankles in panels of mud

as we run along the habits of the swamp
the highways wrap around the blue night

I still your hand on a rhythm of floors
as you shoot up wearing Flipp’s shirt

because love’s a bitch tho
your plug on 53rd & 3rd makes you finite

easier to give than take away from you
& your blood on the bathroom tile

it’s a locking mechanism
Byron brought into being –

I will not ask where thou liest low
Nor gaze upon the spot

we sweat through day again
beneath some slaughtered star

where the air’s personal architecture
haloes you in a growing dawn

you hold it down in all the shit Toto saw
coalesce a child pile in my body arch

It’s enough for me to prove
That what I lov’d, and long must love
Like common earth can rot

Sound tenders here in the fronded sunrise
I sleep in that inert expanse of color

all of thine that cannot die
key lime milkshake

pulsing through Walmarts & banana trees, tricks of the light ferment

the cabal of rattlers & bromeliads spill madrigal drone of katydids

angels in soft junctures raise our heads to prayer our mouths full of guava

as the waves perform their catharsis over & over again
hello kitty diamonds

You’re pretty tonight
in the glow
of the Steak ’N Shake,
as the begonias
press through the dark
to spread themselves.
Something shrieks
from the palmettos, beyond
the light we guillotined
doing bumps in Magic City.
Spavined off a speedball,
you press your finger
to the white of my eye.
It stunts my breath &
amplifies our finitude.
Whatever noise you make
from the bad abyss,
I’ll be there, waiting
in the infant surf
hearing your death
before me – a knell
in the virtual dark,
multiplied by schools
of minnows.
what you couldn’t see from the beach bar

deep under / the nurse shark was an obsession / plundered from the endless season of water / they dragged it around downtown Miami by a rope / peddled it for ten dollars at the fish markets / they believed in the illicit journey from sea to land / the apotropaic essence of things born outside of the known world / things gored from the celestial relish of the sea / so auspicious they make irrelevant the absolute conditions we scam from the ocean’s bottom / it gasped and bled on the floor of the Metromover / hauled over a paradise of lycra and puka shells / over towing garages & housing projects / & left for dead in the basket of a Publix shopping cart / its captors sleep beneath the causeway / & in the morning sun that is new again / they wander off into the steam of the groves / the six-foot shark stopping traffic / what divine fluke had damned it there / buzzing snout to tail with flies?
trap house tauromachy

That picture of you
with the AR-15 on your
plug’s bed in Austin is
honestly kind of hot.

The spliced light of morning
thrown over your shoulder
like a bas-relief of Mithra
killing the sacred bull:

atop the beast he grips
him by the nostrils

with the left hand & works
the knife with his right.

Black neck cleaved
beneath the driving rain

as the animal soul bursts
through its bands of death.

Star of the East! Decanted
from mortal frame

streams of blood
flow into the fosse.

A priest reborn for
eternity as he is laved,

the brute driven from
realm to sacred realm.
When wild things happen, we behave like ourselves.

– John Colletti

Watching Hell’s Kitchen with Lucy

for Austin
o Christ that you were my calling card
in tricked out squall country

that chance may find us
in the violet-gold dusk fluid

outside DQ Grill & Chill
thots of the hyperreal

driving a Barbie car
through the land of milk & honey

caterwaul into neon wilderness
textless immediate & lush

all the mantic ciphers that drive rivers
& find us where we are

so we might heal together
in the Oz of the South

listening to the sound of the surf
at night lapsing into land
Watching Hell’s Kitchen with Lucy, her guinea pig burrows between us, squeaking contentedly in the blue light. Our kneescollapse into a bridge as Ramsay screams about undercooked scallops & the chefs of 2009 rehash their mistakes, teary-eyed in some chain hotel room. If he weren’t fouling the blanket, this rodent could almost be human – a ball of heat, intervening as he squirms around our large world. We touch each other & the middle of our minds melt in a room locked off in language. We are so ceaselessly being, worming around these dishes of hot coconut oil & giving beautiful things to each other via the love-gnosis chain.
The world is always trying to convince us of things more worthy of our time. One would not think twice about the security of the sunrise, of the waves’ constancy.

But then, something jars us out the myopia of our chance priorities: an overdose, a heart attack, a mass shooting on Valentine’s Day. Our faith thwacks open,

like a springform pan. The rainbow being purely locational over the swamp & each day shorn from the wreckage of the wax myrtle.
When Austin died, it became obvious that what you need to do, is become a batch of light & smear yourself around in people until they believe you, like love or like water.

Over fishbowl cocktails, I watch my best friend’s heart break in Alphabet City. I want to take all her pain & throw it in the Gowanus with the heavy metals & black mayonnaise & mutant fish, but some things are out of our reach. I feel like a phony in my three-piece suit, fishing for a day job, while opiates raze the American pastoral. Like Britney, I too break down in the Bud Light badinage, trading Ritalin for Oxys as dogs unspool around the curated vegetation.
When we were eight, Jeana told me to pour milk in my eyes to stop the chlorine sting. Now she goes to state school & I’m talking you into service while you’re nodding,

I’m weeping still & loud as if for an animal & Marissa is telling me I have agency over myself & my feelings & Gwyneth Paltrow is telling me to breathe –
We can’t help ourselves from states of urgency. Strange cuts of fate shatter our worldview & glide us into life. Thrashing the pool to Drake during the pandemic, the neighbor’s kids hang to completion the earth end. For the shock of the osprey, Ben swerved & flipped his car on the reservation, blood and glass raining down the seatbelted necks of boys. They fished each other out beneath the unrefined sun, scattering all the hot, mating lizards.
When Austin died, I realized all this would be pointless if letting go were easy. We return to where we began, to ground ourselves as the birds throw themselves around the sky. We toss Wonder bread into God’s waterways as the palms haul over ridiculous space, watching color arrive in the rain.