

threnody for south Louisiana



Marthe Reed

We deeply regret the wonderful Marthe Reed's recent death.

1

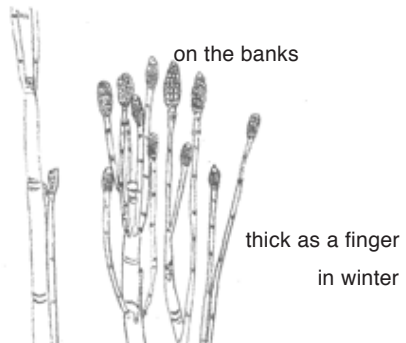
knowing how this will end
such an awkward alliance
an ache that is not pain
magnolia sweet

raising the levees again and again
shelling boiled peanuts
bowing a fiddle
getting there all along

amid the soak and flow
a good life
up and down the coast
barges and rigs

oilfields
gambling on spring and summer
drilled that hole, toolpushing
and quit come trapping season
boat in the water
boat in the water

it gets away from you
this senseless thrashing



2

I keep the contents of my heart
stacked in wet clay
heavy with downpour
an all-consuming rut

the swamp has nothing
on moss and daub
or the shovel buried in my chest
mostly wet

and showed up late
a long cry from there
adjusting to the heat
shrivel and bloom

an abandoned churchyard
headdown in the rain
I think of plumeria, waxy and fragrant
horsetail woods

leaf-and-catkin willow
against the rear door of the church
no matter
empathy only gets us so far

behind the grate the small
eyes of an armadillo
muted reek
of urine and feces

3

waiting it out, we might as well
 forgive the loan
 sorrows stacked like cordwood
 under the stair, a sow's heart beating

at a closer angle, the water's ink
 becomes translucent
 breaking the surface
 and the horizon flips

I push through a maze of dry
 lotus pods, rattled and brash
 distance eroding with the trees
 though everything is up for discussion

the action unfolds off-stage
 a rancid aftertaste
 devoid of future
 a habit of water and erosion

inevitable as the terms of the contract
 tucked into an opposite moment
 rising gulf headed north
then no longer exists

the slow pulse of tidal force
 I am growing into myself
 moss leaf twig stem
 adrift on the wake

4

wind measured as
movement
through a live oak's limbs

this gray branched body
tossed green
against what seems

nothing
at all
a form of memory

what we ask
one another
cultivating time

leaf clatter rising in
morning sun's
urgency

blue jays
brown thrashers
parasitic ferns

morning
displacements
twist into light

warm water's
melancholy weather
like an afterimage of rain

where I find myself
giving way
bruised and awake

Réponds: And what would you say if you could?¹

purplish, every one
a fine, thick
rose
and all the following
along the rivers
Curages
smell like honey
plenty
to the bees



¹ Language excerpted from *Florula Ludoviciana*, entry for Smartweed. Title taken from Bhanu Kapil's questions in *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*.