

John Grey

A VOYAGE INTO THE EVERGLADES

A copperhead hisses, a gator stares
through a veil of brown water.
There are no trails in any direction.
A footprint here is on its own.

Trees contort and soil floats.
Fluttering white feathers whisper of a dove's death.
I couldn't have been marooned in
a murkier, more inhospitable tramping ground.

But I trudge on in search of
fragile beauty in perilous surrounds,
maybe a flower, maybe a warbler.
In the marsh, an unmoving boat sags deep,

weeping between the walls
of herons and mangroves and water-lilies.
An island of grass rustles with
the breathing of unseen spiders.

Heat-sheen vanquishes the distance.
I am as sweaty as three dogs.
Swamp is an abandoned miracle,
purged of revelation, retreating to the mean.

HOW I MARRIED AN ACTUAL PERSON

I admit I was set on an untarnished creature.
She whose face emulates her heart, where loveliness meets
Every other perfection, defines her true nature.
Pristine was the word I had in mind, like the white sheets
That nuzzle into a child's throat, through her dreamtime hours,
Unsullied beauty raised in splendid isolation,
The innocence of raindrops, blamelessness of flowers.
I was eager to sidestep like and go straight to adoration.

Was I deluded by a real person instead,
With whom, after back and forth struggle with my ideals,
I embraced compromise, pretended it was intent?
I chided my conscience, when it inquired what I meant
By man cannot live by dreams alone, that without deals
There'd be no one loving, no one ultimately wed.

YOUR PRAISE

When you said good things about me,
I did not know what to do with the praise.

It pumped me up like air and I floated.
I had no clue where necessary gravity would come from.

Even when the storm moved in, rain fell,
I was still glowing in the sunshine.

When angry traffic noise blared, jackhammers blasted,
it was all silent to me, but for your quiet words.

With so much evidence of the living hell all around me,
I was carving out this tiny piece of heaven.

In a tuneless world, you were singing my name.
In a heavy darkness, you were lighting candles.

I began to see myself through your eyes.
I didn't once miss the old view.

Of course, all this time I was also praising you.
Welcome aboard, honey. Welcome aboard.