

SEEKING FLAME

T.K. Komura

I. Going

End of the rain season, the new moon
and its shade embrowning the boat's pathway—
short hours to the island. Soon,
the marsh-land would show, and I,

enthralled by maps and pictures, hungered
to see what the locals called a "flame tree."
What I'd seen of it before
was a black-and-white photocopy

from an old journal—a Rorschach hieroglyph—
that actually looked muddier
than the stygian bog itself.
But for better

II. Getting There

or worse, the salt-marsh hay
met me in the landing.
How far is it? Each way
I turned, there was no sign—

how useless the binoculars became—
and how quickly—
no lintels in the stardust, and the rain-humes
clouded the lens as the Malaria vaccine dizzied

my eyes. Insanity of destination—
the place I'm getting to, is this what I came for?—
legs enslaved by the swamp, a Circean
transformation into a slow-footed marcher—

there was mud on my feet
I could not undo—a visceral
persistence. How far is it?—
until

III. Seeing

I saw the flame tree

lighting the marsh-land without turning into ash—
its flame swelling downward, repeatedly.
It was the same Rorschach

only with colors.
A tree chased
by a banal curiosity of a traveler
and from all the mud—and preoccupations—of his past

didn't tell me what I wanted, what I looked for
and why I sought to see
the flame. Before and after,
the fire-flies flew hummingly

each one making the fire that didn't burn.
And seeing it, I remained
unawed: the tree was beautiful, and the long travel to the scene
was, I could say, worth it. But I kept marching on.

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