

# 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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