

I was a boy then, running
(unbeknownst to Pa)
errands for Miss Jackie
and Stack-o'-Diamonds' Eula Mae.
. . . Their perfumes,
rouged Egyptian faces.
 Their pianolas jazzing.

O Creole babies,
Dixie odalisques,
speeding through cutglass
dark to see the macho angel
 trick you'd never
turn, his bluesteel prowess
 in the ring.

Hardshell believers
amen'd the wreck
as God A'mighty's
will. I'd thought
 such gaiety could not
die. Nor could our
 elegant avenger.

The Virgin Forest
by Rousseau—
its psychedelic flowers
towering, its deathless
 dark dream-figure
death the leopard
 claws—I choose it
now as elegy
 for Tiger Flowers.

“Good Night, Willie Lee, I’ll See You in the Morning” / Alice Walker

Looking down into my father's
dead face
for the last time

my mother said without
tears, without smiles
without regrets
but with civility
“Good night, Willie Lee, I’ll see you
in the morning.”
And it was then I knew that the healing
of all our wounds
is forgiveness
that permits a promise
of our return
at the end.

Leaving Eden / Ralph A. Dickey

Named and unnamed and renamed
armed and unarmed and disarmed
I have my covenant outside the womb
in the solitary confinement of my cells

The cries of my bones
like the cries of animals
followed me out of my mother
into exile

Butterfly Piece / Robert Hayden (for Robert Stilwell)

Brazilian butterflies, static and perfect as
enamelwork by Fabergé. Jewel corpses fixed
in glass. Black opal flower-skin banded
neargold yellow; sea-agate striped berylgreen:

Colors so intense I imagine them heavy enough
to have broken the live wings—as human
colors in our inhuman world burden, break.

Occult prismatic blue of the morpho,
the great prized morpho that living seems
conjured up by magic hands. Wild beauty
killed to prettify.