

ROSES IN THE WOODS

It was where the map ended;
 The place was half swamp, full of deadness, never owned.
 Kudzu borrowed skeletons of pine and wild berry bush,
 Snapped off canes for its stalking
 Of the few swatches of good ground fleeing ahead.

An out of season quail broke cover, crazed silence;
 I reacted like an overdrawn wire. Fallen branches
 Split underfoot. Sudden pointed pain
 In my ankle—two small punctures—thought went off
 Like unaimed shots: Snake! Poisonous snake!
 But the skin was claw-tracked and blood-beaded and
 All around was the cause. Beyond,
 Magenta spurted up like open arteries between
 Birch bones.

It was no man's land, anti-personnel entanglements,
 Tightrope-walking boughs over redoubts of wood spikes,
 Caltrops on hidden runners conspiring
 With limbs to make trip-nooses. At last
 I touched layers of battle-dyed satin
 With hesitant fingers, and funeral fragrance
 With wide nostrils, perched amid exploding life
 Like a parasite. All blooming concentrated in a six