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THE SINKHOLE

*To imagine a form of language
is to imagine a form of life.*

WITTGENSTEIN

An ancient tuck of seafloor pocket
has been brought to light:

in seconds, a cavern collapses *up*,
its ceiling plunges, retroactively
converting into floor—an aquifer unleashes:

what could be deeper down, we wonder, as
we dive, at dusk, into this freshened
cataclysm, serendipitous depository

that we'll have to improvise an exit from,
when it's time.

There are no ladders from
this ragged benediction tank.

We start to wade and thrash, think
we see signs of retro-life: is that a school
of tadpoles skewed across our vision?—

the optic dance of floaters writhing from
a cornea-?—or just more naturally unnatural
apparitions, badgering?

We float,

become anachronisms,
ball ourselves up like
the garments of our yesteryears,

as forgotten versions of our arms
 and legs wave back across our minds,
 we bob inside a moment's forming nakedness,

like psuedopodic
 organisms at
 the sinkhole's mouth,

the water's surface fun-house mirroring
 the unbeached monsters of our youths—

we thrash about in search of ground,
 that bobbing strip of reference mid-swim,
 each cell in our bodies remembering the first
 coast we swam from, or towards:

Jax. Beach—
Neptune Beach—Fernandina—no,
St. George's Island—

spiraled sunburnt memories coil up our backbone's arch;

we are mammals, dammit, but how do we get out of this—;

Oh yes: a treeroot juts
 above our heads, offers its limbs

to grapple towards, thanks to its exhumed infrastructure:

ragged hand-holds of cross-sectioned oak,
 rough palmfuls of discovery—we know now

who we are inside this groundwater, sunk up—

we know

to hoist ourselves up
 with each bare palm's syllabic press,

an *up!* and clutch and *ouch*, each tree
 root scratch that winds from nerve to nerve, catches

deep inside our throats and

language suddenly swims back—

We flap around the sinkhole's lip,
 grappling for the higher ground

to rear our children on,
 come hell or high water,
 never mind the low.

Illumination flares, goes out, the stars
 have fallen all around us, dazed and drying
 bipeds saying *We have come so far*.

Look. Behind and down, unearthed
 yet back, and up you go—

We'll verbalize the rhetoric of sinkholes,

To mimic how an
 upheaval that plummets
 will be utilized,

as *désespoir*
 the French word for despair
 holds *espoir*—hope,

depressions will transform themselves, convert
 to reservoirs. And now

we say despite our best foundations,
 there's a stealth, chiseled wetland grinding

at our feet, intent—

and now, as we say *Florida*, its lowlands
 will get lower, always binding in a geo-
 thermal dialect, a latticework

of covert, fluid hope, meaning
 lay your firmest groundwork: build it:

we will rise so low.

--Michael Perez