

whittler's lineage

My father makes small talk with a tupelo farmer
he culls his artist's harvest from the swamplands
subdivided and brought to heel
ripe and sweet for carving

They were dying already, the man says,
might as well die for a reason

In our back yard it is black tupelo, and not white-
not desired by the makers, useless
beneath the knife, and so when the salt rises
and they die anyway
It will be for no reason at all

My father considers the long-suffering river
lifting a hand as if to heal or at least frame it
in portraits he paints it is a deep blue
not muddy-gray, under his brush, the marsh-flowers
each bloom their immortal names
and the only tugging tide is sky-bound
breathless in the sight of this setting world

My father and the tupelo-farmer plot how to save
my inheritance, and I am dreaming of how to send it up in flames
So that at the end, beyond harvest, beyond canvas, beneath sea
all of this could be for a reason