Rousseau's Virgin Forest with Panther

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Rousseau’s Virgin Forest
with Panther

Pink hat-sized waterlilies
steam open through the ferns,
a brief distraction
like the flowering cacti
from the very human

shadow beneath the spotted claws.
The beast has taken to his hindlegs
—arrested there—
the pale, exposed guess
of his underbelly turned away.
How taut the clove of his head is,
tipped back to sense
what passes.

His shadow pauses with him.
And all of Paradise
stirs in a breeze pungent now with sweat.
Perhaps they see what’s coming—

the moon
wreathed in pliant branches,
one blood-red round
burning in the pale blue sky,

a moon so full
that like love
it has never been able
to fail, turn
brown, or heal-over.