

## Berry Springs

Step carefully on soft city feet  
down stained steps  
between stone banks  
and buttressed fig tree roots.  
White bodies in multicolored bathing suits  
call to each other below,  
bright against dark water  
in shafts of sunset light.

Two teenage boys  
slowly scale the cascade  
around the source  
where springs gush  
beneath ancient stone  
and explore upstream as far  
as the rusty croc fence.  
Five teen girls, one wearing hiking shorts and  
goggles  
dip and dive nearby.

Ease chest deep into cool water  
among submerged boulders.  
Children's laughter is drowned  
in the roaring cascade.  
Duck quickly under, turn and wedge  
back and feet against slippery rocks.  
Resist the crushing water beating head and  
shoulders,  
until it drives you back  
blind and gasping, tasting algae,  
into the crowded pool.

Dive like the girls among boulders,  
fig roots and small striped archer fish.  
Avoid dark passages leading deep  
into pandanus thickets.  
Surface facing the sky  
encircled by trees.  
Drift like floating leaves  
through pandanus narrows.  
Whistling kites, brown hawk-like birds  
cry above.  
Gem-like kingfishers flash  
from bough to water,  
leave bright circles and return with small fish.

A blond woman in white swim wear  
nurses her infant on the steps  
of the lower pool.  
Two young couples court.  
A circle of solid citizens  
sun themselves on the steps,  
white legs and feet  
in the dark water.

Berry Springs first became  
a popular retreat from tropical heat  
during World War II,  
when barracks for American and  
Australian soldiers and airmen  
were built nearby.  
Before that it belonged to crocodiles.  
Crocs still come upstream from the mangroves.  
Croc patrols scan the pandanus and set traps.  
Several big mugger crocs  
are hauled out each year.

