the up above was bare tree limbs segmenting the sky and a dry georgia fall coated our throats with its dust so we were blowing it out of our mouths—dust as well as words and honestly screams we were screaming like it meant nothing to scream like that—and he and i had plastic lightsabers that did not light up they only retracted and extended and made our arms longer and our swipes swifter and that's how we were: children crunching in leaves and popping each other with plastic toys like it meant something and it did because i hit my little brother in the head pop pop pop and that's honestly how it all started with the plastic pop pop pop and then it turned out we both had cottonmouths inside us—two children in the leaves with toys but also we were pit vipers baby pit vipers and pit vipers are heat sensing we were/are heat sensing it turns out: call us cottonmouths water moccasins vipers and we will swing our diamond-shaped heads around to look you in the full full face

to lock my bedroom door i pushed and twisted to the right and that day my hair was peppered with dry leaves my veins coursing with venom and i pushed and twisted my door knob my little brother roaring outside shaking his fists and then a pause and then the sound of cratering (wood on wood) and later i counted 27 holes and they stayed there my whole childhood those 27 holes cannot repair a hollow door the truth is that the sun was bright the light like a knife and my brother was gripping that rifle its butt heavy and determined and he went pop pop pop pop pop pop pop pop 27 times and he meant it all 27 times because there is something living inside him and me something that's been there always and sometimes we call it cottonmouth and sometimes we call it holy spirit but more often we are at a loss for words sifting rage through our fingers and coming up empty-handed

my little brother was given his first gun at 11 years old at 11 years old my brother was given a new england firearms 223 single shot crack barrel it was christmas day and our tree had flashing multi-colored lights and the living room was a kind of fair everything smelling like sausage and maple syrup—but my little brother was given his first toy gun way before that when he was born (the toy gun was a hand-me-down from grandaddy to daddy to him) colored like maple syrup this legacy of heavy wood this imitation rifle looked just like a rifle except there was no chamber because again this was solid wood: outside my brother would twirl it like a baton and he would stand beneath it as it rotated and dropped from the sky he would stand there and know he was born with the hands to catch it