

# Blood Dazzler

POEMS

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*"Data from an Air Force reserve unit reconnaissance aircraft . . . along with observations from the Bahamas and nearby ships . . . indicate the broad low pressure area over the southeastern Bahamas has become organized enough to be classified as tropical depression twelve."*

—NATIONAL HURRICANE CENTER

A muted thread of gray light, hovering ocean,  
becomes throat, pulls in wriggle, anemone, kelp,  
widens with the want of it. I become  
a mouth, thrashing hair, an overdone eye. How dare  
the water belittle my thirst, treat me as just  
another  
small  
disturbance,

try to feed me  
from the bottom of its hand?

I will require praise,  
unbridled winds to define my body,  
a crime behind my teeth  
because

every woman begins as weather,  
sips slow thunder, knows her hips. Every woman  
harbors a chaos, can

wait for it, straddling a fever.

For now,  
I console myself with small furies,  
those dips in my dawning system. I pull in  
a bored breath. The brine shivers.

8 A.M., SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2005

*Katrina becomes a Category 5 storm, the highest possible rating.*

For days, I've been offered blunt slivers  
of larger promises—even flesh,  
my sweet recurring dream,  
has been tantalizingly dangled before me.  
I have crammed my mouth with buildings,  
brushed aside skimpy altars,  
snapped shut windows to bright shatter  
with my fingers. And I've warned them, soft:  
*You must not know my name.*

Could there be other weather,  
other divas stalking the cringing country  
with insistent eye?  
Could there be other rain,  
laced with the slick flick of electric  
and my own pissed boom? Or could this be

it, finally,  
*my* praise day,  
all my fists at once?

Now officially a bitch, I'm confounded by words—  
all I've ever been is starving, fluid, and noise.  
So I huff a huge sulk, thrust out my chest,  
open wide my solo swallowing eye.

*You must not know*

Scarlet glare fixed on the trembling crescent,

I fly.

## UP ON THE ROOF

Up on the roof, stumbling slickstep, you wave all your sheets and your blouses,  
towels, bandannas, and denims, and etch what you ask on the morning:

*When are they coming to save us?* cause sinking is all that you're feeling.  
Blades spin so close to your breathing. Their noise, crazy roar, eats invective,

blotting out words as you scream them. They turn your beseeching to vapor.  
Water the dark hue of anger now laps at the feet you can't stand on.

Cameras obsess with your chaos. Now think how America sees you:  
Gold in your molars and earlobes. Your naps knotted, craving a brushing.

You clutch your babies regardless, keep roaring your spite to where God is.  
Breast pushes hard past your buttons. Then mud cracks its script on your forearm,

each word a misspelled agenda. But here come the flyboys to save you,  
baskets to cram your new life in, the drama of fetching and swinging.

Some people think that you're crazy. As you descend from the heavens,  
you choose to head for the questions. The earth and its water. The swallow.

## ETHEL'S SESTINA

*Ethel Freeman's body sat for days in her wheelchair outside the New Orleans Convention Center. Her son Herbert, who had assured his mother that help was on the way, was forced to leave her there once she died.*

Gon' be obedient in this here chair,  
gon' bide my time, fanning against this sun.  
I ask my boy, and all he says is *Wait*.  
He wipes my brow with steam, says I should sleep.  
I trust his every word. Herbert my son.  
I believe him when he says help gon' come.

Been so long since all these suffrin' folks come  
to this place. Now on the ground 'round my chair,  
they sweat in my shade, keep asking my son  
could that be a bus they see. It's the sun  
foolin' them, shining much too loud for sleep,  
making us hear engines, wheels. Not yet. Wait.

Lawd, some folks prayin' for rain while they wait,  
forgetting what rain can do. When it come,  
it smashes living flat, wakes you from sleep,  
eats streets, washes you clean out of the chair  
you be sittin' in. Best to praise this sun,  
shinin' its dry shine. *Lawd have mercy, son,*

*is it coming?* Such a strong man, my son.  
Can't help but believe when he tells us, *Wait*.  
*Wait some more*. Wish some trees would block this sun.  
We wait. Ain't no white men or buses come,  
but look—see that there? Get me out this chair,  
help me stand on up. No time for sleepin',

cause look what's rumbling this way. If you sleep  
you gon' miss it. *Look there*, I tell my son.  
He don't hear. I'm 'bout to get out this chair,  
but the ghost in my legs tells me to wait,  
wait for the salvation that's sho to come.  
I see my savior's face 'longside that sun.

Nobody sees me running toward the sun.  
Lawd, they think I done gone and fell asleep.  
They don't hear *Come*.

*Come*.

*Come*.

*Come*.

*Come*.

*Come*.

*Come*.

Ain't but one power make me leave my son.

*I can't wait, Herbert. Lawd knows I can't wait.*

*Don't cry, boy, I ain't in that chair no more.*

Wish you coulda come on this journey, son,  
seen that ol' sweet sun lift me out of sleep.  
Didn't have to wait. And see my golden chair?



## SIBLINGS

*Hurricanes, 2005*

Arlene learned to dance backwards in heels that were too high.  
Bret prayed for a shaggy mustache made of mud and hair.  
Cindy just couldn't keep her windy legs together.  
Dennis never learned to swim.  
Emily whispered her gusts into a thousand skins.  
Franklin, farsighted and anxious, bumbled villages.  
Gert spat her matronly name against a city's flat face.  
Harvey hurled a wailing child high.  
Irene, the baby girl, threw pounding tantrums.  
José liked the whip sound of slapping.  
Lee just craved the whip.  
Maria's thunder skirts flew high when she danced.  
Nate was mannered and practical. He stormed precisely.  
Ophelia nibbled weirdly on the tips of depressions.  
Philippe slept too late, flailing on a wronged ocean.  
Rita was a vicious flirt. She woke Philippe with rumors.  
Stan was born business, a gobbler of steel.  
Tammy crooned country, getting the words all wrong.  
Vince died before anyone could remember his name.  
Wilma opened her maw wide, flashing rot.

None of them talked about Katrina.  
She was their odd sister,  
the blood dazzler.

## KATRINA

Weather is nothing until it reaches skin,  
freezes dust, spits its little swords.  
Kept to oceans, feeding only on salted water,  
I was a rudderless woman in full tantrum,  
throwing my body against worlds I wanted.  
I never saw harm in lending that ache.  
All I ever wanted to be  
was a wet, gorgeous mistake,  
a reason to crave shelter.