

After the Levees Breached...

By Carra Leah Hood

For my father who's from there, Megan who's dreamed of living there, and my friends at LSU whose blood's down there...

They mouth "Help us"
for cameras
write out their plea on cardboard
on the front of their houses
on their t-shirts.
Their dogs howl
abandoned on rooftops
trapped in attic crawl spaces
cats claw glass, behind windows
in the distance.
The evacuees from N'orleans
stand outside the Convention Center -
no room for them inside -
or sleep on the exit ramp
connecting Route 10 East to downtown.
Pointing at helicopters circling overhead
they cough bloody green-yellow sputum graffiti
spraying "Fuck off" on what's left
of the levee at London Avenue Canal.

Wading through waist-deep sludge
hand paddling plastic storage bins
past remnants of clothes
other families' photographs
water-logged stereo equipment
soggy newspapers turned pulpy goo
swollen garbage bags half submerged, twist ties intact.
The evacuees from N'orleans
float through the once-neighborhoods of the 9th Ward
deeper into the humidity of decaying bodies
shit-strewn E-coli, urine, flames spitting ethylene
sweetness of rotting pomegranates.

Mississippi's revenge?
The end of history?

No jazz razzmatazz
beads coconuts 24/7 hooch
chickory laced A.M. spikes

jam that don't shake like jelly
parading masked identities
Chief Indios
crawfish etouffee highs
green geaux gumbo jumble
or bluesy woosey criollo drawls
swaying lovers on Bourbon Street.

Four of them, two children,
who did not know her before the flood
cover her face with a damp bed sheet -
70, diabetic, bloated, blue lips ("Mercy, mercy")
she'd've gotten the needle at Charity.
The evacuees from N'orleans
call her Sheba
from Domino's lick.
"Her kidneys failed last night"
the four of them hum in mourning
kneeling on the cement floor of the Superdome.

Inside outside
scarce food, water.
Black, white, Latino, Asian, scratching arms
drawing blood
trembling from the cold
in 100-degree unventilated arena -
the evacuees from N'orleans
"Never seen the Saints' play!" -
need a line, need a snort.
Leaky dicks, always erect inside,
check out girls asleep on cots
looting virgin pussy for food.
Renegades outside smash storefront windows
run hugging cases of Similac, bologna, American cheese,
six packs of water, bread, milk, aspirin, soap.
Cops chase them
away from stuffed cherry tops
journalists shoot them -
aim, save, store, "It's a wrap."
Sirens swirling red eieio
(a brother in blue's had enough).
Nabbed on digital memory cards
the evacuees from N'orleans
look back:
"It'll all go bad, it'll all go bad, we're starving, we're dying, it'll all go bad."

Oh, when the Saints,
Oh, when the Saints,
Sing along!
Oh, when the Saints go marching in,
I wanna be
I wanna be
I wanna be