

All
the
Bayou
Stories
End

with
Drowned

poems

Erica Wright



Black
Lawrence
Press

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I

Lola and the Apocalypse

She sees catastrophe in every crow,
in every knocked-down clothesline—mostly

volcanoes and floods but sometimes scourges,
blue tongues, waves that forget their place

and storm into cities. Her mind stops at flesh peeling
back from the bone until it's white as milk,

the kind that makes grown men grow breasts,
and they feel that this is a catastrophe, but it's not.

Once when men were automobiles, the roads were slick
with sweat. They gleamed. Days were lost

to spectatorship, making bets on which color would rise up
out of the dark. Our girl made twenty dollars

on violet, but someone stole it. Who knows who?
It was hard to tell one chrome from another.

You couldn't cross for fear of getting hit, a parade
of reds and browns. And maybe the afterlife is a bookshop,

and she's been good, so she'll get to loiter
by Pop Culture/Crime instead of Business/Money.

From her perch, she'll count personality types. The schizotypals
will never object when she fondles their frontal lobes,

that gray, dirty satin. Elbow-deep in it. Her epigraph will remain
unwritten because there's no one left to scrawl platitudes:

For every pain, there is a duck with your name on it.
But there aren't any ducks. At ponds worldwide, they ate
each other when no guests tossed crumbs and shooed away
the geese that strike as if their bodies are lit fuses.

When cities were coal mines, the children played
color games, too, but it was hard to determine a winner.

Lola knew a man there who didn't balk at anything, could stare down
whatever slime-bellied beast approached their home.

She can't recall his name, but it could have been Roger.
They had books, too, mostly Cultural Studies.

"Maybe I'm not alone," she thinks. "Maybe the devil stalks me
right this minute, wants me to run, make it more *exciting*."

Lola sits down on the nearest ledge. "Ha," she thinks. "Haha."
She doesn't notice the fissure at first. It sneaks
between floorboards, and when she pries them apart,
her fingertips bleed in protest. They drip
onto the bleach-white worms that catch fire in the light.
And then the floor collapses and then the world.

The survivors are called hostages or will be
if any are met. Hostages in pines, hostages in barns,
hostages in the great wide open
that makes them feel slit, wrist to armpit, in littleness.

Insurance of the Future

Peeling fingers can mean nothing
but shingles, and human-sized amoebas

lurk in every tunnel, like the time a bear
of a man emerged in the dusk to ask

for directions, then change, then what
to do when galaxies collide and we rip

from the pressure, crotch to throat.
Are we a new species then? Or are we gone

the way of ancestral mammoths?
Quirks of survival leave us roaches

but not pterodactyls. So much for majesty.
So much for writing a letter to your best lover

and explaining his pulse on your back
makes up for rising in the dark, suiting up

to step out into the Milky Way, yes,
but also into a void you can't touch.

Slick with cayenne and stardust,
let's make an advertisement for despair:

Welcome to planetary warfare!

Do you know much about lasers?

Where do you see yourself in five hundred years?

I see myself in a spacesuit riding a mammoth,
trying to diagnose myself from fever and scabs,

and according to the internet,
I may not even be human. It's that bad.

The Twin Nature of Wedding Guests

The groom gets drunk enough to lose
the feeling in his hands and invents

a cure for loneliness by accident.
Who needs inoculation?

The bystanders have never known such
promise and take it out on each other.

There's a ride home with too much
singing for those who still have the ache,

those who tuck their heads against the glass,
watch their noses in reflection,

remember earlier trips in the backseat
of Mom and Dad's Chrysler

when they thought their skin looked nice
in the headlamps of other cars.

The driver wishes everyone
could move faster along the highway,

longs for the quiet return,
and this dual longing—

to be loved, to be left alone?
There is no cure for it and never will be.

Spontaneous Human Combustion

You can't mask the scent of sulfur
once it sets in the upholstery.

That's as far as we've come in understanding.
Someone was here, and now he's not.

Sometimes your insides want to become
your outsides, and you have to tell them "No."

I remember *chaud*, but have forgotten
the French for cold, the sensation

of needing to burrow, of nosing dirt aside
to bury myself in the basement's crawlspace.

There's a sound like swing-set chains
unwinding. Not like the time I snipped

my ring finger while maneuvering scissors.
Blood pooled, and there was no way

to test for tetanus. The great chasm of years
since inoculation weighed on me. Lockjaw:

as if a key went missing along with the ability
to tell someone, "Look out!

The sky hasn't looked friendly for days."
I do not like to argue, even with people I love,

but there's only accident out there in the flatlands,
bright as any phenomena, cruel as any store-bought pyre.

Disguised Weapons, Everyday Objects

With the right combination
of numbers, a phone discharges

.22 caliber rounds, and that's enough
to silence the witnesses.

Bedposts fall under
"less spy, more convenient"

and can be wiped clean.
All the women line their eyes

with kohl, let the points extend,
and this is only dangerous in cases

of mistaken identity, doppelgangers.
If you meet yours, kill yours,

even if your hands resist,
refuse to break the windpipe

of yourself, but it's not yourself,
only a mirror-image

with a better job, boyfriend,
Labrador Retriever to your mutt.

We hunt a wild boar with spears
made from brooms and cut mason jars.

If the boar spoke, he would tell the story
of three little girls who used a pinafore

as leash and noose.

Marigold left school one afternoon

and came back a suitcase,

complete with destination stickers

for Barcelona, New Guinea,

and the Arctic Circle.

It's tricky to gauge the recoil

without television shows

that pit Apaches

against Maori Warriors

as if this weren't as awful

as little moon-faced killers,

you and me if we could disappear

as easily as we mind the gap, afraid

to have our bodies severed

by oncoming trains.

Truth or Dare

Ruby complained of blood blisters
and extra work shifts for snowing the cafeteria.

I wasn't there, but I had to scrub pots anyway.
This is how adolescence goes sometimes

unless you're a brat, and you're no goose,
my darling, you're no last-picked nor nicknamed.

I claim I lost my only bracelet on a dare,
messing around with another camper's letters,

as if anyone ever asked me to play games
of those sorts, ones with bottles the color

of outfields, the color of elsewhere.
Midnights were beyond me, filled as they were

with cardigans and the howling of some stuck beast,
lions in another lifetime, but there a coyote at best.

This was meant to be a love song, I can tell you now
that I've failed. It was meant to propose we build

a house, hang the rafters and the screen doors,
so no bats nor opossums could take us by surprise.

Once when I was camper-aged, I surprised
a rat snake nesting among keys and cassette tapes.

“Look,” he said, “you don’t need this corner of forgotten like I do.”

So I let him be until those in charge

took charge with rakes and beheadings.

You don’t want to marry me. I lose things.

Abandoned Doll Factory

The heads forever piked,
stripped of torsos, limbs, dresses
meant to imply animation—

that and the eye springs.
Lids sink and sleep
the sleep of toys and machines

left praying in the dawn.
Who's called by their insistence?
Out there beyond plywood

and bolts, do wayward teens mind
the warning signs or giggle
toward another bloated horror like

*The Case of the Drowned Cosmetologist
or Reports on Acid Baths & Gender Relations.*

They never ask about manifestos
scrawled on breakroom mirrors
the day the conveyors stopped.

They'd never see the mastermind
there anyway, taking paint
to the scooped-out cheeks.

Nobody's intended, these girls,
not the ones peering in
nor the ones peering out.

Age of Discovery

Space feels like scales moving under bare feet,
but we never trust the neighborhood astronaut.

He can say whatever he wants and still gloss up
the grocery magazine covers. Once, Sammy promised

protein shots, quick jolts in our shoulders,
but we're placebo-savvy, kids of cartoon dynamite,

how it never blows as directed, and anyway,
villains barter better than heroes, can lose

because they've lost before and survived the fallout.
Take pirates and their workman's comp: \$800

for a limb lost while hailing kraken, then rueing
their own bravado when face-to-tentacle

with hand-to-god mayhem. A million miles up or down—
it's all the same trick in the handheld mirror,

the same twins mugging in the dressing room.
And Sammy, if you're still there, we confess

to bottle rockets in your driveway. We wanted to see
if they could travel past the radio tower beacon.

We thought whatever monster blinked up there
might want to know that was someone was trying—

however many light years away from success—
trying with the far-flung hope of future explorers,

our backpacks heavy with unread guidebooks,
knowing the difference between you can and you must.