

ACADIANA

NANCY REDDY



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Dirge

First the sky
broken by birds

flying at the wrong season.
Then the heat goes and the breath goes out

and we are left alone and voiceless

between the blue untextured sky
and the terrible smooth water.

And then the howling like the seam ripped out
and all the under waters and the roaring gods.

After, the live oaks and honey locusts storm-shorn.
The shorebirds' great nests splintered
and all the fishing houses split-legged and sodden.

After, the dead lifted in their rotten boxes
and left to bob in storm water. The shoreline
carried out to sea.

What is this raw and wind-worn place
we have survived into. The wrong gods

roar into our lungs now.
A weeping sound like that. Like those birds

calling across the suddenly open water.

Girl Chooses Flight

She bought a black dog
because she wanted bad luck. She drove south
as far as the dark mood would move her.

And on the radio—nothing but Christ and zydeco:

*Once in heaven—once in hell—
you don't get to come back and try it over.
You don't get to call back Lazarus.*

She drove long hours through the parched towns
and two-pump truck stops of the northern parishes,
the highway striped with blown-out tires,
her hood and windshield black with love bugs
locked in mating.

And then the swamp before her
like a ballroom with the lid torn off.

The air at that first hour
had the sheen and hue of polished silver.
Slender tree trunks, weathered gray and splintered,
poked through still water.

A voice said *stay*. She stayed.



The girl seemed to stay like that for days, a fixed star
in the emergency pull-off lane.

At night the black dog blanketed her and at dawn
they pressed their faces to the glass. Hard to say
what she thought of then. Or what she waited for.

Then the god appeared to her in denim.
He asked her for one kiss and when she dodged

he spit into her mouth.

After that, the girl's hair grew golden
and sticky as corn silk. After that
the girl spoke only lies.

The Sibyls Choose Her

She had the sun-split look
of one whom the god has loved, however briefly

and she was weeping and speechless
when we pulled her from the car. No longer fit
for life in town.

We carried her to the swamp bed
and laid her by the fire. Her hair smelled then
of lemongrass and dishwater.

We used slivered sedge for kindling
and sliced the shorebird down its spine.

We bled the bird into the marsh
and when the water did not hiss and blacken
we knew the girl would do.

We pulled the dark meat from the ribs
and fed it to the sleeping girl.

When the girl was full and cradled
we let the flames die down and held her
to the fire's former heart

and seared her tongue against the rocks to bridle it.
A terrible and unhinged shrieking. Then

she opened her throat
and sang.



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Nancy Reddy is the author of *Double Jinx* (Milkweed Editions, 2015), a 2014 winner of the National Poetry Series. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in 32 *Poems*, *Blackbird*, *The Iowa Review*, *Smartish Pace*, and elsewhere. The recipient of a Walter E. Dakin Fellowship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference and grants from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship and the Sustainable Arts Foundation, she teaches writing at Stockton University in southern New Jersey.