

ZEKE CALIGIURI

# THE STORMS

*Waiting for Irma and Maria in September '017*

I argued with my mother in the morning for three days  
in my head. I didn't know she was dead yet.

Irma and Maria were still only blooming  
tropical sisters accumulating their rage.

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You were just here, followed your son to his most recent exile.  
You sat on the other side of jail glass, exhausted. At the last prison:  
you could sit across from me, hug me on the way  
in and the way out.

You just told me I was spoiled when I was already almost forty years old.  
Eighteen years into this abyss that is really a box, that is  
nothing other than any of the locked corridors in our brains we hide within,  
torture ourselves with. Who spoiled me? I am talking about memories—  
shifting shapes

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We were once a future; lies we could tell.  
It was always summer when I got out.  
You were always there to welcome me home.

The future is a lottery, though, madness  
drawn in smiles cut into the soft tissue  
of our faces—hardening and cracking,  
shifting with every grin:  
the Joker. The lunatic lottery  
plucking lives until we are all gone.  
That is the future.

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Someone told me she was dead. A voice on the phone said she was gone.  
I couldn't believe it. But I did. People have been lying to me for so long.

I knew it was real by the chilled breath on my neck,  
the shiver from the cold of the steel on my cheek, because there was

a hollowed-out space where soul electrifies body. I should  
have known by the words sliced across my face—even the mirror knew  
already.

I should have felt the end by the fights we had in the mornings  
after you died.

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You were just here.  
I was in the midst of attack—  
You said I was spoiled, I was going to be forty.  
Was it anxiety attacking me, or fear

or that I really *was* spoiled,  
that I was weak.  
*I gave you everything I had! Everything!*  
*It all went to you!* The money and the love and the time:

all of what would be my inheritance.

There is panic and there is shame.  
There is panic and it is the sound of your name  
annunciated in all its different categories  
in my memory.

I have been reading letters of sympathy from your friends and mine.  
I am keeping track. I made a list with all of their names in my notebook.

A slight pinch  
at the chord between my throat and my heart—these are probably the last  
times  
I will hear from many.

And those footsteps, benign. The last we would ever make, empty  
circles of these rooms, these locked spaces, this jail. Our last breaths  
inhaling the toxins in the smoke I gave you. A son, whose black smoke  
you watched rise from a burning temple of carcinogens.

There is a panic and it is your name.

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On Christmas  
A man hanged himself.  
It wasn't me.  
I could call  
to celebrate.

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Storm chasing. The hurricanes; Irma and Maria  
enraptured us. If we knew there was a wrath of water  
rising, would we have tried harder  
to explain ourselves to each other?

If we both knew death would come  
crumple you in a corner in your bathroom,  
would we have lived with less anger  
towards the keepers of the keys, or the gavel, or tried  
to disrupt the prosecutor's harangue? Would we have spent all  
that capital after the last annihilation: just to get decimated  
again?

If we knew the world was ending,  
would you have still fought so hard  
to tell the world  
of my humanity?

I have worn your rage to cover the binding of my hands, and of my mouth.  
I will still hate those people.

It's four o'clock, where are your kids, Mom?  
Chasing balls in the street? Playing tag  
with Sig Sauers? In a jail fracturing into pieces?  
Who will clean up the mess? Where will the garbage go?

A woman told me in her card: "Your mom really had love figured out."

Irma and Maria blew us away. Smithereens, they say.  
*Blowing in the wind*. If you run you might catch it,  
it may tell you what it meant by its devastation.  
"Every mother has a child that doesn't speak to them."  
I'm talking now. Can't we talk, now?

In the last days,  
Granny chose to talk about  
The Anoka tornado of '29,

Mom spoke to me of the Thanksgiving Day parade in MacGregor  
Iowa, hiding behind her father while a man with crazy eyes  
threw live turkeys from the back of a truck. The whole town  
skellied for dinner. A swirling apocalypse  
Of untamed beasts being thrown to their slaughter.  
Of children learning to swim in the black swirl of the  
Mississippi.

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There is a graveyard outside of  
every home we've ever lived.

Rain came—not the romantic kind.  
The flood your basement, whole lifetime  
In boxes at ankle level, kind of rain. Sideways  
Kind of rain.

The old-world smolders  
Ashes like ghost stories,  
shadows spread thin.  
The ruin—glyphs carved from.  
They were wars that took  
All of you to wage.

The sum at the end  
Would never feed you.  
Or return to you what you were owed.

The rain came—without smiles,  
Not even an ounce  
Of pity, remorse for our destruction  
The ways the winds push the past  
And fight to get through it.

My mother taught me to swim.  
Sinking isn't floodwater's greatest threat.

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Your chest opened  
An accumulating flowage of Sludge  
dredged from the rivers  
feeding into your heart—a lifetime.

Your heart a furnace.  
Someone says: it matters what the fuel is  
that it burns from: gas or ether,  
or ferocity.

I dreamt this was all your plan  
Written in clues since before I could speak.

Love, the falling madness.

And then I was ashamed because I didn't have the words she deserved  
To speak for her love.

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There are just things in this life you have to believe in,  
or you'll die. It sounds crazy.  
I was always afraid of her in a way  
that I never was of my father. It is fear of not  
knowing how all-encompassing real love is.  
That it would haunt me—  
because I didn't love enough back,  
that once it was gone,  
it would be gone forever.