

Fleeing Florence

Written by Vivian I. Bikulege



**Poem & photo
by Vivian Bikulege**

Turning our left cheeks to the ocean,
we leave home under an awning of heat lightening
to beat traffic soon to funnel
onto the hurricane evacuation route.

Mandatory.

Signs posted along Highway 21 North
wear a blue and white graphic,
a silent, bloated, spiked propeller in a dead spin,
static symbol for HURRICANE!
Versus Matthew and Irma, we take less this time.
We leave behind a car,
some photo albums,
furniture, clothes, towels and shoes.
We abandon all of our tools and the three bicycles,
our fishing rods.

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I choose flight over fight.
What I cannot control, I choose not to face.

A repeat rescue of beagle and terrier,
I consider accumulation,
vowing to purge, again.

I own nothing in the face of wind and water.

After a week at my brother's,
four hours up and west from the South Carolina coast,
we return wondering,
"Why them and not us?" *This time*.

At the rest stop on I-95,
south of floods closing lanes in North Carolina,
green Porta Pottys labeled *Nature's Calling* line the curb,
a thick, white, rope fits snug along the plastic roofs,
secured to the ground through metal, eyelet spikes
threaded like a giant's shoelace.

Our neighborhood is hot and dry.
A newspaper lays flaccid on the concrete driveway
with headlines about lives lost
to borderless Florence.

She is a depression.
Her tornadoes pirouette on Virginia.
She spits less than an inch on Pennsylvania,
our southern rivers yet to crest,
the Waccamaw and Pee Dee.

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Getting out of the car,
exhaling invisible relief into humidity
I watch two love bugs make a soft landing
on the windshield.

It's that time of year again.